

The Harbinger of Life

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/2645141) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/2645141>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	F/M, Gen
Fandom:	Pocket Monsters Pokemon - All Media Types
Relationship:	Kasumi/Satoshi Ash Ketchum/Misty
Character:	Satoshi Ash Ketchum , Kasumi Misty , Hikari Dawn , Takeshi Brock , Satoshi's Pikachu Ash Ketchum's Pikachu , Riolu , Giratina , Diaruga Dialga , Parukia Palkia , Aruseusu Arceus
Language:	English
Series:	Part 5 of The Road You Choose
Stats:	Published: 2014-11-20 Completed: 2015-01-26 Words: 54,188 Chapters: 11/11

The Harbinger of Life

by [skylightsparkle](#)

Summary

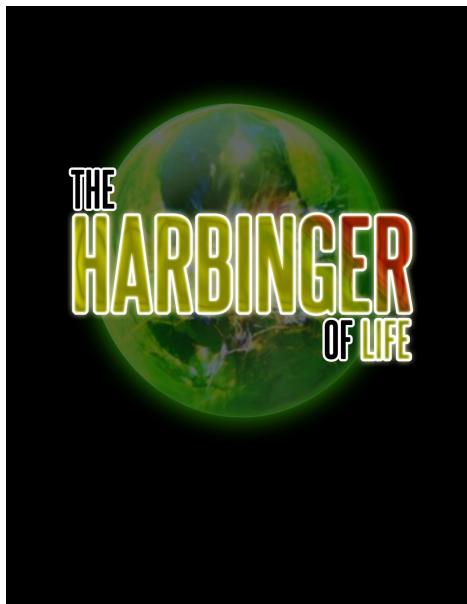
The signs and the warnings were all there, but only to those who were looking. Now judgement will reign down upon them for the mistakes of the past. Time cannot be changed without great consequence, and Ash is about to learn that nothing can be classified as just good or evil. Not even him.

Sequel to Distortion.
AU Novelization of Arceus and the Jewel of Life.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

To Michina Town We Go



Harbinger

/hahr-bin-jer/

noun

1. A person or thing that announces or signals the approach of another.
2. Anything that foreshadows a future event.

Synonyms: herald, sign, indication, signal, omen, forewarning

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The air was calm, the sky was blue with no clouds in sight, and the sun was shining down on them without interruption. It was, by all appearances, the perfect day to be traveling. In another time and place, they might have been traversing through a massive field of cornstalks, or something similar, but that wasn't the case now.

Dawn hugged Piplup close to her chest, adding his heat to that of her dark pink winter coat. Her boots crunched along the thin layer of snow and the dead plants beneath, and her breath rose up in front of her in twisting wisps. Her teeth chattered a bit and she asked, "Are we almost there?"

"Yeah," Brock answered, clumsily thumbing through his guide book due to his thick gloves. "Judging from the fact that we're trespassing through this corn field, we should be getting to Michina Town soon." Though he had on a thick green and orange jacket, the cold was still biting.

"Good. I want about ten cups of hot chocolate and five heated blankets," Dawn mumbled into the soft fabric of her thick, white scarf.

"Pip piplup!" Her pokemon agreed. He wasn't nearly as bothered by the cold but even he thought it would be nice to get indoors for a while.

"I don't want to get to Michina Town," a voice grumbled from in front of them, and Dawn's eyes rose from the ground to stare at Ash's back. He was walking ahead of them, hands dug into the pockets of his dark blue and black jacket to keep them warm. Dawn frowned a bit at that, because

she told him to buy thicker gloves, but he insisted that the lighter ones his mother sent would be fine. Clearly he had never experienced a Sinnoh winter before. It tended to get a lot colder than Kanto, Johto or Hoenn.

"Speak for yourself, my feet feel numb," Misty replied to him, walking close to him for warmth even though both of their voices were more confrontational than friendly. She had on a thick red jacket, with fake-fur lining and yellow detailing, but Dawn couldn't blame her for just wanting to get out of the cold.

"They're going to start again, aren't they?" Dawn asked Brock warily, holding onto Piplup with one arm as she tugged at her dark pink jacket. The young girl was infinitely glad that her mother had sent her a thick pair of black leggings to wear under her dress.

Brock shrugged as he tucked his guide book away. "Probably."

"You know what I meant!" Ash snapped at her, keeping his eyes forward as far as they could tell. His shoulders tensed up slightly as he yelled, "Be careful guys!" Though the boy's voice was louder, it wasn't nearly as annoyed as when he spoke to the girl beside him.

Pikachu and Ria the Riolu were bounding ahead of them, bouncing through the snow drifts and over the dead, frozen plants. Pikachu waved at him to acknowledge that they heard, but he continued to play whatever silly game it was that they were playing. Dawn had offered for Piplup to go earlier, but he'd rather stay in her arms to keep them both warm.

"Stop being such a baby." Dawn had to hand it to Misty, words aside, her tone was a bit annoyed, but she was also trying to be understanding. "The Sinnoh Conference isn't that far away."

"Mmmhmm." Ash mumbled his acknowledgment.

Dawn looked up at Brock and nodded at them. "What are they arguing about? I thought I knew but what does it have to do with the Lily of the Valley Conference?"

"Misty's catching the shuttle in Michina Town to get to the airport in the next city over. It's out of our way so that's why we didn't just walk there."

"Yeah, I know that." She tilted her head slightly. Ash tended to get a little pouty when the redhead had to leave after her visits, but he usually wasn't this annoyed. That was one thing that Dawn liked about Ash, that he was such a strong advocate of people chasing their own dreams. He understood that his friends couldn't always be with him and cherished the time when they could. As Brock said, he normally got a little sullen when Misty had to leave, but he'd always been thankful that she could visit at all.

"April is an absolutely ridiculous month at home for gym battles. Not only do you have the new trainers coming in, but you have the older ones looking for last minute badges so they can participate in the league. It happens every year until the cut off." He saw Dawn about to ask a question and held up a finger, indicating that she needed to wait a minute. "I know April seems far off, but gyms tend to start getting busy in March. Plus the league usually does annual inspections in February, unless they think there's a problem with one."

"Oh." Dawn's bright blue eyes went wide with realization. "So she won't be able to visit?" Ash's mood suddenly made a little bit of sense. He tried not to be obvious about it, but he confessed to Dawn at one point of time that he did miss the redhead when she wasn't there. She couldn't blame him, Misty wasn't just a friend, she was his girlfriend and it would actually bother Dawn if the older boy claimed that he didn't miss her. He always got so excited for her visits that it really didn't

surprise her that he'd be sullen to know that the girl couldn't visit anymore.

"No." Brock shook his head. "I get why, and I know he does too but, well you know." He nodded towards Ash and Misty, who were whispering madly at each other, obviously trying to keep whatever argument they were having on the low-down.

Dawn rolled her eyes, an amused smile appearing on her face. "They're ridiculous."

"That they are," Brock agreed with a genuine laugh.

The blue-haired girl turned back to face the others, tilting her head curiously when she saw that they had both halted their argument and their movements, staring at the ground with confusion.

"It's snow guys," Brock quipped sarcastically. "We've seen a lot of it lately."

"Hardy har har," Misty replied dryly, glaring at him briefly before her eyes turned to the ground. "I can see that. It's what's under the snow that's weird."

To prove her point, Ash squatted down, clearing off the snow by their feet. Dawn's eyebrows rose as she realized exactly what had them so perplexed. In the spot that the brown-eyed boy cleared off was a perfect line of yellow, dead grass that she was accustom to seeing in winter, contrasting sharply against thick, full, bright green grass.

"What the?" She and Brock both hurried forward, looking at the scene with confusion. Brock examined the grass before looking around. "Maybe it just snowed?"

"It's not just the grass though, look." Misty pointed away from them, towards a bush where bright, cheerful flowers were in full bloom. The ones beside it were completely dead. "It's a perfect line."

Dawn realized that she was right. It was like there was some invisible barrier that cut off the living plants from the dead ones, going as far as she could see in either direction. There was still snow on them, and the air was just as cold, but that didn't deter the plants from growing. "Did a pokémon do this?"

"Maybe," Ash spoke up, kneeling on the snowy ground and taking off his gloves. He pressed one hand against the dried grass, the other against its lush counterpart, and closed his eyes. It absolutely fascinated Dawn to see the very faint glow that resulted in him using aura. It was barely noticeable, more just like his skin going pale for a moment, but it was something his friends could easily notice. "Huh." He got up, rubbing his cold hands together and tugging his gloves back on.

"What?" Misty urged him, nudging his side.

"It's weird. There's this...energy here." He pointed at the green grass, his face full of confusion. "I've never felt anything like it before. It actually stops right where the grass does and loops back to wherever it comes from." He pointed out. "I'll bet you my mom's cookies that it goes in a full circle."

He was probably right, and that made Dawn feel a little uneasy. Brock said that they were almost to Michina Town, so it had to be within the limits of this strange barrier.

"Pikapi!" Pikachu's voice rang out to them from across the snow-covered clearing. Ash took off in that direction, stumbling and slipping on the sleek snow and grass. It was a lot harder to walk on than Dawn expected it to be, let alone run.

Pikachu was sitting atop of snowbank, looking alarmed but not at all hurt. Joining him, it was easy

to see why he was stunned. There was a river down the hill from them, water flowing freely, except for farther down. It was a ways away, but they could still see a piece of ice randomly start along the top of the water.

"Okay, this place is really weirding me out," Ash admitted, holding out his arm and letting Pikachu jump up onto it.

"Rio ri," Ria agreed, though she seemed pretty content with pushing around a snow ball as if trying to make a snowman. She stumbled, tiny arms waving around wildly as she slipped.

"Ria!" Misty darted out to grab the pokemon, letting out a yelp as she ended up slipping on the snow-covered grass. Holding onto Ria, she ended up skidding down the short hill, crashing into the water.

"Misty!" Ash yelled with alarm and slid down the bank after her. He came to a stop at the edge just as she broke the surface of the water, gasping for breath and shaking.

"Wait up here," Brock told Dawn as he slid down beside Ash, reaching out to help Misty out of the obviously frigid water. Dawn was originally going to argue, but changed her mind. She wouldn't be of any use down there and if she went down, she could slip into the water too.

Ash put Ria back in her pokeball, a smart move since the cold couldn't keep bothering her there. He wrapped an arm around Misty and helped her back up the hill, Brock following them closely to prevent anyone from slipping. The eldest of the group looked up at her with a serious frown. "We need to get inside somewhere so she can dry off and change."

Dawn agreed, seeing how the tips of Misty's bright orange hair were already starting to freeze. She looked around, bright-blue eyes zeroing in on a couple of people walking not far from them. She darted out and yelled, "Hey!"

The boy and the girl stopped, looking at her curiously. Like her, they both had blue hair and eyes, albeit, lighter shades than her own. Dawn came to a stop in front of them, her throat aching from the icy air. "Do you know this place very well? Is there a Pokemon Center nearby? My friend fell into the river."

"Oh," The girl looked behind Dawn with startled eyes. "Yeah, we can show you the way, right Kato?"

"Sure thing Kiko. Follow us!" The boy motioned for them to follow the pair through the field, down towards a small bridge that arched over the water.

"You okay?" Ash asked Misty as they walked as quickly as possibly.

"Yes." Her voice came out sharp and annoyed. She took a deep breath, coughed and said, "Sorry. It just hurts a bit. I'll be fine when I can change."

Dawn let out a sigh of relief that Ash just let her annoyance go. She shook her head as they crossed the bridge and followed the path, coming up the hill to reveal a small but beautiful town. An intricately, hand-crafted sign read 'Welcome to Michina Town', and Dawn took a deep breath, almost choking on the cold, crisp air.

She didn't have any sort of special powers or abilities, she was just a normal 10-year-old trainer, but she had a strong feeling that something strange was going to happen.

Didn't it always?

Frayed Seams

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Brock leaned against the counter at the Pokemon Center, his stare intense and focused. The Nurse Joy that was behind the counter glanced at him over her shoulder, a clear look of wanting from his point of view. Yes, she was definitely interested, but who wouldn't be? He was the Brock-o and all the ladies loved him. His pokemon were all with said lovely nurse, so there was no way Croagunk could pop out of his pokeball, not this time.

He opened his mouth to speak, but the only sound that escaped his lips was a sharp yelp as his ear was pinched and his head was yanked to the side. His eyes watered and he looked up, the sting fading out to confusion when he saw that it was Ash who had done it. Sure, it wasn't the first time the younger boy had grabbed him by the ear, but it wasn't exactly a common thing. He normally just completely ignored him.

"What are you doing?" Ash was visibly annoyed, from the way he held himself, to his voice, to the look in his eyes.

"She likes me, Ash," Brock insisted almost a little too eagerly, rubbing his ear as the boy let go.

Shaking his head and then pushing back the raven hair that fell into his eyes, Ash sent him such a stern look that it was actually more surprising than him being the one to grab Brock's ear. "Just because someone looks at you doesn't mean they're interested, Brock. You're being a creeper. She's not here for you to look at."

"Wow, someone's been listening to his girlfriend rant." Ash tensed up at Brock's words, and the young man held up his hands in surrender. "Okay, okay, I know you're right." He looked him up and down, frowning deeply. "Are you okay?"

"Just fine." His voice was short and curt. Ash's face faltered a bit, the annoyance and anger seeping off of it as he sighed and shook his head. "Sorry. I guess I'm just frustrated." His smile was slight but genuine.

"You wanna talk about it?"

"Not really." He shrugged. "Not yet, at least. I know who to go to when I'm ready though."

Brock laughed and clapped his hand on Ash's shoulder. "That's right, you do. Even when I leave." Maybe that wasn't the best thing to say, because Brock knew that a part of Ash's irritation came from the fact that Misty was going to leave later on that day and they wouldn't actually see her again until the Lily of the Valley Conference. She vowed to be there for that.

Instead of a slump of his shoulders, Brock was a bit surprised to see Ash brighten up. "Did you decide where you're going to school yet? Any of them would be stupid not to accept you." He sounded so eager and curious that it just made Brock smile more. There was the normal Ash that he claimed as yet another younger brother.

"I sent my applications to a couple places around in Kanto and Johto. I'm really hoping to get accepted into the Pewter University though. For obvious reasons," Brock admitted. "I thought about Hoenn and Sinnoh too but it's a bit far from home and it's not like I'm loaded." Having ten children made it hard on the Slate family financially, but they got by.

"Sorry to interrupt," Nurse Joy walked over, smiling at them but firmly keeping her eyes on Ash, much to Brock's chagrin. "Your Riolu will be fine. Pokemon can handle cold like that much better than people, and you got her into her pokeball quickly enough. I must say, she's a tiny one, isn't she. Oh." The nurse smiled and shook her head. "It's not a complaint or a question. I can tell that you take care of her very well. I've just never seen one so small for that age."

Brock watched with amusement as Ash rubbed the back of his head, a clear sign that he was a bit uncomfortable. "I'm glad she'll be okay, but Ria's always been tiny. There was an accident and her egg hatched early."

"Ah, that can happen." As much as Brock adored Nurse Joy, he was glad to see that she just took the explanation and went with it. "Your friend, how is she doing?"

Ash motioned towards the lounge area where Misty and Dawn were huddled on a couch, watching television and talking quietly. Both were holding mugs of hot chocolate but Misty was wrapped up in several blankets, the occasional shiver still rustling her body.

"Hmm," Nurse Joy frowned. "She wanted to know when the shuttle was leaving. There's one going in fifteen minutes and it's the last one until Monday. However, it's getting colder outside, and she really just should stay in here to warm up." Her bright blue eyes flickered from the girls and back to Ash. "You'll tell her, right?"

"Yeah." Ash nodded his head and Nurse Joy walked away. Almost immediately a frown appeared on his face.

"Hey now, I know you'll miss her, but she need to go home. You know how her sisters are."

"Yeah," he nodded his head in complete agreement. "But Nurse Joy said she shouldn't. Her jacket isn't even dry yet." Ash frowned a bit before sighing. He pushed himself off the counter and walked over to where the two girls were sitting.

Brock just shook his head and brought out his book. Of course he was planning on reading for a little while, it had nothing to do with being subtle about watching the goddess that was Nurse Joy.

Nope, not at all.

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By the time Brock was done the book that he legitimately ended up reading, he looked up and saw that an hour had gone by. He blinked in surprise, a bit affronted that neither Ash nor Dawn had come to tell him that Misty left. The redhead herself didn't even come to say goodbye.

He turned to talk to his two younger friends, expecting to see a moping Ash sitting on the couch and Dawn trying to cheer him up, but that wasn't what met his eyes. Misty was still there, leaning on Ash's shoulder as she dozed off while Dawn was leaning on her.

The young man made his way over, and Ash's brown eyes met his. Almost immediately Ash appeared like a small child who knew that they broke the rules but still did it anyway. "I know, I know."

"The shuttle left 45 minutes ago," Brock hissed, not wanting to wake either of the girls up.

"I know," Ash repeated, annoyance lacing through his voice. "I was going to tell her, I swear, but she was still so cold and none of her clothes are dry. Not even her boots. She could have got really sick."

Brock rubbed his forehead. "So you just didn't mention it?" There was nothing they could do about it now.

"Well..." From the way Ash trailed off, Brock just knew that he was going to get some sort of headache. "I told her we already missed it. She was pretty annoyed but getting distracted by that weird grass, falling into a river, not to mention Team Rocket trying to take our pokemon earlier all got us sidetracked." Brock raised an eyebrow and Ash sunk down in his seat slightly. "I just...she looks so much like she did last time." Brock looked at Misty, trying to see what Ash meant. Her skin was a bit paler from the cold, but her cheeks were flushing from the warmth that was radiating into her. He knew that she'd be fine but he also suddenly realized what Ash meant.

"Like when Shaymin poisoned her," Brock muttered, and Ash nodded his head almost shamefully. "You're worried, I get that. That's okay, to be worried, but..." Really, telling her that she'd have to wait a few more days to get home just because he was worried about her health was an incredibly tame lie. In Brock's opinion, no one should ever lie in a relationship, but he knew it happened. There were a lot of worse things to lie about. That and he kind of understood where Ash was coming from. Misty's trip there a few months ago hadn't exactly been the best one in the world for many reasons, being poisoned included.

"I get it, you don't need to lecture me."

Brock shifted in place awkwardly, because that's exactly what he wanted to do. He sighed and shook his head. "I'm going to go make something for supper then. Don't let them sleep too long or it'll mess up their sleep schedules." He turned and walked away, glad that he could take his slight disappointment and focus it on something else. It was a small blessing, in his mind, that trainers were allowed to cook in the small kitchens of most Pokemon Centers when they weren't in use.

After clearing it with Nurse Joy (and trying not to stare too much), Brock made his way to the kitchen. Maybe he could make some of his No-Chew Stew. That was always a hit.

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Cooking was always the one thing Brock genuinely enjoyed doing at home. He was good at all house-hold chores, of course. That was a result of needing to be able to do it well. Feeding nine other mouths (including two infants since he was 10) wasn't an easy thing, neither was keeping the house and gym up to standards, but he did it and he did it alone. Sure, cleaning and sewing could be cathartic too, but not as much as cooking.

Michina Town apparently didn't get many visitors this time of year, because the Pokemon Center was empty aside from them. People who lived there came to drop off or pick up their pokemon, but apparently only one other traveler took a room there. Brock took the open space to make as much as he pleased, and he was quite proud of himself. Nurse Joy stopped by earlier to tell him it smelled great, and of course he offered her some when it was done.

His peace was shattered by the sudden explosion of noise coming from the lobby. Two angry voices nearly screaming at each other. Brock felt his heart drop because he'd know those angry sounds anywhere. Turning off the stove and moving his stew so that it wouldn't burn, he hurried out of the kitchen, skidding to a stop at the entrance of the Pokemon Center's lobby.

Nurse Joy was staring with wide eyes, clearly too stunned to reprimand them while Dawn was sitting on the couch, her hair a mess and her hand over her heart. Brock would bet the little money that he had that the screaming woke her up suddenly.

Ash and Misty were standing, facing each other. Misty's hands were curled into fists at her sides

while Ash's arms were crossed and he was leaning away from her slightly. Their faces were red with anger and their voices just kept getting louder and louder.

"...And that's why you're an idiot!" Brock was glad that he didn't hear the first of her statement. "I always knew you were slow but this just takes the cake! I told you a million times that I couldn't stay any longer—!"

"This was different!" Ash interrupting, his voice rising in pitch slightly. The last time Brock had seen the relatively easy-going boy somewhere close to this type of anger was back with Shaymin.

"Different?!" Misty took a step towards him and Ash took an instinctive step back. "Ugh! What were you even thinking!"

"That I'm allowed to be worried about your health!" This time Ash stepped towards her, his hands dropping to his sides.

"I would have been in the cold for a little bit then I could have went home where it's a lot warmer than this hellhole!" Misty screamed at him, and Brock shifted warily, eying the way her hand was twitching. He hated getting between their arguments, but if she tried to physically lash out, he would step in and stop her. "Ever since I got here you've been clingy and bossy! Who gave you the right to decide what is or isn't good for me? Stop trying to tell me what to do!"

"I'm not!" Ash groaned in frustration, his voice lowering but his eyes flashing angrily. "I never have! Why don't you just listen instead of flapping your mouth!"

"Excuse me?" Brock took a few steps closer, because with that comment, this fight was becoming dangerously close to the ones he remembered from when they were kids and Misty would hit first and ask questions later. He silently prayed for the boy to keep silent, but luck was not on his side that day

"You heard me! You're not even listening to me!" Ash waved his arms in the air.

"There's nothing to listen to! You decided what I was going to do, knowing it was the opposite of what I wanted!" She stomped her foot on the ground, cheeks red from frustration. "Now I have to go and tell my sisters I'll be late coming home and hope that they don't burn down the gym or something." She glowered at him. "Mew. I'll be glad to stay home for a few months."

"Maybe you shouldn't come back at all." The second the words left Ash's lips, he looked like he instantly regretted them. Brock knew how they worked when they argued, often saying things that they didn't mean. Ash was a particularly bad culprit for this since he just said whatever came to his mind. It hadn't been a problem recently, he and Misty got along except for small disagreements, but never like this.

"Hey, break it up." Brock finally moved himself in between them, despite knowing that it could be a very dangerous thing. Ash looked so sheepish and sorry that the young man didn't worry about an attack coming from him, so he turned his full attention on Misty. He wasn't surprised to see her cheeks red with anger or her hand curled into a fist, but he was slightly taken back by the tears brimming up in her eyes.

"That's exactly what I plan on doing!" She stormed by them, shoving Brock out of the way in the process.

The young man looked at her retreating form with shock, but his attention snapped to Ash as the teenager practically growled under his breath and turned in the other direction, storming up the

stairs towards the rooms that they got for the night. "Ash, wait!" He didn't listen.

Taking a few deep breaths, he turned to Nurse Joy and said, "I'm so sorry about that." She just took a deep breath and waved him off, retreating back behind her desk.

"Brock?" Dawn's shaky, quiet voice brought his attention to her. She stood up, her eyes wide and confused. "Did they just break up?"

"I don't know," he replied honestly with a shake of his head. "Do you know what set this off?"

"It was a mess. I was mostly awake but I was still laying around so I saw the whole thing. Nurse Joy stopped by and said she was glad that Misty decided to stay. Misty was confused so Ash admitted that she could have made the bus but he told her she missed it. Then they started snapping at one another and it got louder until you heard them screaming." The blue-haired girl sighed and shook her head. "From what I get, he shouldn't have lied and she should have listened."

Brock put his hand on her shoulder and nodded when she looked up at him. "Sounds about right. Not many people your age would see things that clearly." People older than her often didn't see the truth that the vast majority of arguments were two-way deals. He was sure that if he asked, Misty would blame Ash and Ash would blame Misty.

He could feel a headache coming on, and shook his head. "Come on, lets get something to eat. We'll deal with them once our stomachs are full."

"That would be nice," she agreed, following him back to the kitchen.

...

"Hey, have something to eat." Brock pushed the bowl of stew in front of Misty. The girl was still sitting in front of the telephone, though she had hung it up long ago. It was kind of odd to know that she had such a bad fight with Ash, yet there she was wearing his clothes while hers dried (Brock's had been far too big, Dawn's too small).

Misty looked up at him, eyes tired and wary. "You're here to defend him, right?"

"Nope." Brock sat in the chair beside her. "I'm here to make sure you eat that stew. It's warm, so it'll help make sure you don't get a cold."

Her expression softened and she said, "Thanks Brock." She started eating, but her eyes kept darting to him, and it only occurred to him a moment later that she probably wanted him to say something. Either to justify her anger or make her see that she was completely overreacting. She definitely was overreacting, but he wasn't going to say that.

"I'm not going to put words into his mouth." The young man shrugged. "You wanna know what this is really about, ask him. Just not right now. Cool off a bit."

Misty stirred the warm liquid around, staring at the chunks of vegetables and meat floating in the broth. "You'll check on him, right?"

"Of course." Brock took that as his cue to leave. He stood up, straightening his shirt and said, "Oh, by the way, all the rooms only have two beds, so you'll be sharing with Dawn tonight. Room three."

"Alright." Misty nodded her head, and he turned to walk away. "Brock?"

"Hmm?" He looked over his shoulder at her.

"Do you think he knows I didn't mean it?" Her eyes were scared, and it was a look that was so uncommon on her that it made him pause. He wasn't going to lie to her about this either, choosing to shrug his shoulders.

"I don't know. I think that's something you need to talk about on your own." With that, he left the room. He had another friend to feed.

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"Ash?" Brock peaked into the room that the two boys were sharing, eyes instantly locking onto the bed. The teenager was facing away from him on the bed. Instead of walking right over, the older boy set the food on the table and hesitantly walked forward with his hand in front of him. His cautious instincts proved to be on the ball when his hand came into contact with a physical barrier.

From what Brock had seen before, Ash was always instinctively powerful with his Aura, though he lacked control over it. The younger boy finally got the opportunity to train with an actual Aura Guardian for a while. Ash stayed on Iron Island with Riley for a little while, Brock and Dawn traveling to the nearby cities and towns in an attempt to get her Ribbons. Ash caught up to them again, but he stayed mum about the whole training thing and what it really consisted of. What Brock did see was that Ash was very good at handling Aura in a subtle way so that no one noticed he was using it. There were no more wild movements like throwing his hands out, just things suddenly happening with the slightest of motions.

More than once, if Ash wanted to be alone in his thoughts, he silently put a barrier around himself so that no one else could bother him. Brock and Dawn had both ended up running into them before, and it was like running into a glass wall.

"Come on, you need to eat."

"Not hungry." Good, he could hear, but his words were alarming. Brock could have dealt with him being angry, annoyed or tired, but not hungry was a weird one.

"I don't believe that. Eat. It's my lazy boy stew." He watched Ash shift, knowing that it would get his attention. The boy sighed, rolling over to his side as the barrier vanished. Brock turned, grabbing the bowl and shoving it into his hands. He sat on his own bed and asked, "So, is there anything you want to talk about now?"

"No." Ash stirred the contents of the bowl before taking a few bites. "No point talking or thinking about it. She won't listen."

There it was, the blame that Brock had been waiting for. To him, it was obvious that Ash was just being a little hostile because he was hurt, but he chose not to point that out. They were both so stubborn that it would do little use. He knew from past experience that the way they made up was when chose to. Other people trying to force them would just make them snip at each other for days on end.

"Just, try to think about it rationally, okay? Don't get too upset." Ash sighed and Brock expected him to put up a fight, but instead he just nodded. He saw that as a bit encouraging.

"Do you mind if I stay alone, just for a little while longer?" Ash asked, brown eyes almost pleading as he stared at Brock. "I know you're my roomie and all, but just for a bit?"

"Sure thing." Brock clapped a hand on his shoulder. "I was going to sit with Dawn and watch some

TV anyway." His expression turned stern. "You eat all of that, got it?"

"Got it." Ash smiled, a genuinely thankful expression, and he continued eating. Brock just shook his head and left, closing the door behind him. His friends were impossible.

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Despite the (rather ridiculous, in his mind) drama, Brock found it easy to slip into his slumber that night. He dreamt of Nurse Joy and Officer Jenny, until dream-Croagunk (who, oddly enough, had a red wig with a sideways ponytail and familiar glasses on) jumped up, hitting him with his Poison Jab.

Brock grumbled with discontent. Even in his dreams his beloved pokemon ruined everything. He was partially awake, and that was why he heard the gasp and the crash from the opposite side of the room. Brock jerked up, looking around to see Ash practically fly to the window.

"What are you doing?" Brock scowled as he watched his friend press his hands against the most-likely cold glass.

"Brock." Ash's voice was so startled and shaky that it made his annoyance fade away. He looked around, tanned face almost pale from the moonlight bouncing off the snow outside.

"What's wrong? You look like you've seen a ghost."

"Giratina," Ash said, looking back at his reflection. "Giratina was here." There was so much certainty in his tone that the older boy instantly believed him.

Brock stood up, walking over to the window and staring at the reflection. He blinked with surprise when he saw it shift for a moment, a massive red eye staring at them before vanishing. He and Ash exchanged worried looks.

Whatever Giratina wanted, it was sure to cause trouble.

Chapter End Notes

I wasn't going to update today since I wanted to get back on track to when I normally updated (which tended to be a Sunday for some reason...maybe a bit of enjoyment before you guys went back to school? I dunno), but since it's Thanksgiving for my American readers, I decided to update for you!

A couple people on ff.n got what I meant when I said there was something odd about the first chapter and that makes me really happy. It's an oddity that continues on in this chapter by the fact that we don't get to see Ash's point of view. Not really. Now obviously this isn't first person POV so it's not entirely just one person's view, but I've always tended to follow around one person more than the others. Usually this is Ash, but I've skipped around to Misty and others as well. This time, you have no idea what's actually going on in Ash's head, or Misty's for that matter. You don't get to see what he 'feels' with his aura or anything like that.

This chapter gives you a bit of a glimpse of one of the reasons I decided to go this way. Lets see if you guys pick up on what that is!

Oh, and one person picked up on something else I purposely did just as a fun little tidbit that doesn't matter to the story. In 'Between Time and Space' Misty was just arriving, in 'Distortion' it was in the middle of one of her visits, and in this fic, it was the end. I am so impressed that someone picked up on this.

Til next time!

Written by: Skylight Sparkle

Edited by: CLAVUS

Distorted Spaces

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Dawn stood awkwardly at the door, tugging one of the sleeves of the shirt she wore under her dress. She wanted to go into the kitchen, but wasn't really sure what to say or do. Ash was leaning against the counter, picking at a piece of toast (though not eating it, much to her alarm), and she didn't want to say anything that might get him upset.

She opened her mouth to say hi, or at least let him know that she was there, but her stomach gurgled loudly before she got the chance. Ash looked up, a ghost of a smile threatening to pull at his lips as he raised an eyebrow at her. The young girl ducked her head slightly, cheeks red with embarrassment.

"I'm not going to pitch a fit or something if you walk in the room, you know." Ash shrugged, ripping off a corner of his food and eating it. "You can eat."

"I know, I just..." Dawn trailed off as she walked in, shrugging helplessly. She was honestly a bit surprised that he was acting so casual, so normal, like yesterday hadn't happened.

He narrowed his eyes slightly as he tilted his head. Sighing a bit, Ash ran a hand through his hair and said, "You didn't do anything. I'm not going to take anything out on you. I'm not a time bomb."

No, that much was true. Ash was impulsive, and he would easily argue with people or act offended, but it took a lot to really get under his skin. He was stubborn, but he largely had his temper under control. The same couldn't be said about the redhead that she roomed with last night. Dawn didn't mean to, but just mentioning Ash's name last night seemed to set Misty off into a combined fit of rage and sadness that still frightened her to think about. It was the reason she was so hesitant to speak to him.

"Where's Brock?" Dawn tilted her head curiously as she reached for the bread. It wasn't like him to sleep in, though it was very early in the morning. She was never up this early, enjoying the times she got to sleep in, though she also knew that Ash liked to train Ria with Aura early in the morning.

"Sleeping. We had a really weird night." Ash hesitated, shifting a bit and biting his lip. He stared at her uncertainly before finally deciding to speak again. "We saw Giratina."

"What?!" Dawn clapped her hand over her mouth, dropping her bread to the floor. She lowered her voice and asked, "Are you sure?"

"Positive." Ash looked out the window above the sink. "I'm going to go look around. There's something really strange about this place, and I want to know what it is."

Pursing her lips, her eyes narrowed at him. "Well, I'm coming with you then." She pointed at him, knowing he was going to argue. "It's just to walk around town and see if anything strange has been happening. I mean, you could just leave, but you can't stop me from following you. So it's probably better if I just go with you."

"You're infuriating, you know that?" He sounded more amused than annoyed. He pushed what was left of his food to her. "I'm leaving in a few minutes, so if you wanna come, eat that and hurry up."

Rolling her bright blue eyes, Dawn still scooped up the barely touched food, deciding not to let it

go to waste. She wasn't normally the type to easily pick up someone's leftovers, but she was hungry and she also didn't want him to take off without her.

Hurrying up to her room to grab her coat, Dawn shrugged it on before putting her hat and gloves on. She stopped moving when Misty rolled over, but the older girl was definitely still asleep. Dawn was about to pick up Piplup and leave, but she hesitated, glancing over her shoulder at Misty again. Shifting from foot to foot, she sighed and grabbed a piece of paper and a pen, scribbling a quick note that she had gone with Ash on his small quest to check out the town. At least someone would know where they had gone.

Despite his earlier claims of leaving without her, Ash was waiting with Pikachu perched on his shoulder. She smiled at him, holding Piplup close and peering around. "Where's Ria?"

"Keeping her in her pokeball for now. She's still tired," Ash explained, yawning and stretching a bit.

At first Ash appeared like he always did to her, but up close, Dawn could see just how tired he actually looked. As they stepped outside into the brisk, morning air, it occurred to her that he probably didn't sleep much the night before. Between his fight with Misty, and Giratina appearing, he must have been awake almost all night.

"We can always look later," Dawn reminded him, letting Piplup move up onto her shoulders. It wasn't quite as cold as the day before, much to her relief. "You seem tired."

"I'm fine." He shook his head as if to clear it. "I'm thinking of following the strange energy and seeing where it goes, what do you think?"

"Might as well." She decided not to argue with him. Worst case scenario he's bit cranky from being tired or hungry, but Dawn was good at ignoring that.

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"Brock!" The young man squeaked and pulled the blankets up over his fully covered chest, staring at Misty with horror. She rolled her eyes at him. "Don't be such a drama queen. Get up!"

"What are you doing in our room?" He looked around wildly, towards Ash's bed, expecting to see an irritable young man, but was a bit surprised to see that he was gone. "Huh?"

"He and Dawn are looking for weird things around here. Or something like that. They'll probably just wind up getting into trouble though." Brock was a little more awake, and able to see the worrying hiding behind her annoyed exterior. She was probably right about them getting into trouble, so he stretched a bit and got out of his bed.

"I'm going to get changed. I'll meet you downstairs in a few minutes." She nodded her head and quickly left the room, no doubt very content with herself for getting what she wanted.

As Brock dug through his bag to get a long-sleeved shirt, he realized that Misty was probably far from content at the moment. He honestly felt a little bad for even thinking that. At least she seemed physically fine, her dip in the water not affecting her at all.

He hurried along, tugging on his clothes, jacket and boots before rushing down the stairs. He slowed down, staring longingly at Nurse Joy, who was sipping on a cup of warm coco. Well, he knew it was probably coffee, but there was something about his mental image that just seemed a lot warmer.

"Brock!" He jumped, startled out of his day dream yet again by Misty's grating voice. She hurried towards him, already decked in her warm red jacket, jeans and boots. She motioned for him to come over to where she was, and he just sighed. Looking back, he stared at Nurse Joy again. Some people might have said she was oblivious to his adoring stares, but the young man preferred to think that she was just trying to keep things professional.

He turned his attention back to his friend, blinking slightly when he saw the young, blue-haired kids from the day before. Looking back, he never really thanked them for getting Misty inside so quickly, though he vaguely remembered that someone had. Dawn or Ash maybe.

"This is Kato and Kiko," Misty motioned to them, and they nodded. "I ran into them while I was getting my pokemon. They said that they might have an idea where Ash and Dawn went."

"We will," Kato spoke up, blue eyes sparkling mischievously, "under one condition."

Misty looked at him sharply, her sea-green eyes narrowing dangerously. "Excuse me?"

"One condition," Kiko added with a grin and a wink as she pulled out a pokeball. "You guys beat us in a battle."

Brock had known Misty for years, and it was that knowledge more than anything else that made him take a few steps back from her. Her cheeks turned red with anger, her fingers curling into fists and if she had that mallet that she used to carry in her bag like she did when they were kids (claiming that a girl could never be too careful and always needed protection), he was sure it would have made a reappearance. Luckily, the redhead had grown beyond acting violently at a moment's notice.

"Look," he spoke up, stepping in between Misty and them. He really didn't have it in him to deal with more fights. "Maybe we can battle later, okay? We just really need to find our friends right now. They're not exactly..." He trailed off, not quite sure how to describe it. "Okay, they attract danger wherever they go."

"And no offense," Misty added, her voice a little more strained than normal, "but this place is really weird and that makes it worse."

"It's just one battle and—."

"Look kid, I'm not in the mood for this right now." Misty took a step towards them and they took a startled step back. "I am the Gym Leader from Cerulean City in Kanto. I have a Gyarados with me that will wipe the floor with you. If you want to have a battle, fine, but it'll last all of two seconds."

Brock groaned and pushed her back some. "Hey, don't take your bad mood out on them, they said they'd help us."

She pouted at him, but at the same time the teenage girl also looked ashamed of herself for snapping. He just shook his head and sighed, facing Kato and Kiko again. "Sorry. It's been a long couple days. Could you please tell us where you think our friends might have gone?"

Kato looked like he was going to argue, but Kiko put a hand on his shoulder and shook her head when he looked at her. She motioned for Misty and Brock to follow her, and she walked a couple feet off of the cement walkway. Reaching down, she pushed the snow off of the pristine grass.

"You said this place was weird earlier. This is what you meant, right?" she asked curiously, her blue eyes darting up to them. Brock and Misty both nodded, so she continued. "Well, we don't find this strange since we've been here our whole lives but people who pass through in winter are

always pretty dumbfounded. See, Michina has been like this for...well...a really long time."

"Like thousands of years long," Kato added with a nod of his head. "Since the time that the ruins were actually used."

"Ruins?" Misty repeated slowly, her eyes narrowing in thought.

"Yeah. I mean, you can't really come to this town without seeing them. The temples are from thousands of years ago!" The boy replied almost excitedly.

"Some say that there's a powerful object in the ruins. It keeps Michina alive all year long just like this." Kiko motioned to the grass. "That's a legend though, since no one's been able to actually find anything. Archaeologists, researchers, explorers, adventurers, trainers, doctors, even grave robbers have searched for it and they found nothing. The only proof that there's even some fact to it is how everything stays alive here all year long."

"The Keepers of the ruins will be able to tell you more. They'd actually be up there." Kato motioned to a massive cliff side. "If weirdness follows your friends, that's definitely where I'd look for them. Just follow that road." He pointed to the left. "You'll get there no problem."

"There's even a cable car," Kiko added. "Makes it easier to get up because that's one hell of a climb otherwise."

Brock shielded his eyes and looked up towards the mountain in question. "Well, it's a better place to start than any."

Misty sighed, and the older boy was sure that she wanted something more along the lines of Ash and Dawn's exact location, but he was just grateful that they had something to go on at all. A strange object that kept an entire down alive with a strange energy was quite the story. However, they both knew that the lines between legends and life were a little more blurred than most people thought.

"Lets go," Misty agreed, running her fingers over her pokeballs to count them again. They must have been on the same wavelength, because Brock was mentally checking his too. If there was something that powerful around, trouble was bound to start up sooner rather than later.

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"Woah," Dawn breathed out as her eyes panned up to stare at the mountains around them. She was very familiar with mountain ranges herself, since Sinnoh was covered in them, but there was something breath taking about this strange twist of winter and spring that was all around them. Perfectly formed leaves and flowers glittered with snowflakes, waterfalls crashed down sending flecks of water up into the air that quickly formed light ice crystals, sprinkling the area with snow. She looked down at the clear, open lake in front of them as Pikachu and Piplup went forward to check it out, sipping at the probably freezing water. "This is amazing."

Looking towards Ash, Dawn got the feeling that he did agree with her. Ash was never shy about gaping at things that he thought were truly astounding, be it a new pokemon, a mountain range, or some strange piece of new technology. The teenager's bright brown eyes darted around, staring at things that she couldn't possibly imagine let alone see herself, but at the same time he was completely missing everything else.

There was something strange about this area though. Something abnormal that she couldn't quite put her finger on. Taking a few steps closer to the edge of the lake, she stretched out her arms and

took a deep breath. "You can feel the positive energy flowing through this place!"

"Huh?" Ash looked at her, visibly started. He then thought about what she said, and Dawn was a bit surprised to see him smile. Normally when things started getting strange, he became a little more withdrawn and suspicious, but his smile appeared completely genuine. "There is a lot of positive energy around here." He turned, looking up at the plateau that rose above them. "It's what we've been following. It's not bad at all, just...weird." Ash tilted his head a bit, eyes locked on the shapes high above them. "Wonder what's up there?"

Dawn squinted to focus more. "I think it's a temple, or it used to be. Something like that." She glanced over at him. "Think that's where the energy is coming from?"

"Seems like it." Dawn didn't know whether she should be excited for getting it right, or put off by the fact that she just knew he'd want to climb up there. Lost in her agonizing thoughts over how long it would take, she didn't even notice Ash tense up until he took a few steps backwards and bumped into her, pushing her back behind him. "What are you doing?"

"Pikachu, Piplup," Ash spoke to the two pokemon calmly, but seriously. "Get away from the water."

"Pip?" Piplup was just as confused as she was, but Pikachu's fur was standing on end and he was slowly backing away from the water. If Ash's reaction wasn't enough to make Dawn wary, Pikachu's definitely was.

She gasped and took a step back as the water started swirling in front of them, gently at first in an almost beautiful way, but without warning the waterspout became massive and violent, twisting on the spot.

"What is that?" Ash muttered, more to himself than to her. She followed his gaze up the vortex of water, blinking with surprise when she saw it vanishing into a swirling black hole. Dawn didn't mean to, but she was pretty sure that she screamed as the pull of the vortex became strong enough to start jerking them towards the water, grabbing onto the back of the older boy's jacket to keep herself steady.

"Pikachu!" Ash cried out over the whistling of the wind. Pikachu didn't look at him and he didn't say anything else, but the pokemon charged himself and unleashed a powerful Thundershock towards the waterspout. The electricity interrupted whatever was causing the disturbance, and the water fell back into the lake.

"What was that?" Dawn uttered, her voice crackling painfully in her throat and her fingers aching from how tightly she was holding onto his winter coat.

"I don't know," Ash's voice was oddly strained, and if she didn't know any better, she would have swore that he sounded a bit afraid. "It's just so..."

"So?" She prodded him.

"Angry." As if his words prompted something, the Pidgey that were nearby took off into the air, soaring away as quickly as they possibly could. A moment later, they could hear the alarmed cries of other pokemon as they started stampeding through the forest.

"What's happening?" Dawn couldn't stop her voice from shaking. She didn't need any sort of special powers to feel that something really bad was happening around them. Never before had she ever seen so many pokemon so alarmed. In any major crisis, they always seemed to stand up and

fight, not flee.

"We need to get out of here," Ash muttered, actually unable to hide the fear he was feeling this time. She glanced from the forest up at him, but he was staring up at the sky with stunned alarm. The wind started whipping around them, blowing her long locks into her face.

Dawn pushed them out of the way, following his gaze and gasping in horror at the massive hole that was appearing in the sky above them, creating the wind that became stronger by the second. She screamed as a massive waterspout shot out of the water, four smaller ones rising up around them, twisting together into a gigantic one.

The blue-eyed girl cried out in alarm as Ash grabbed her arm and started running.

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"You know, this place is actually really amazing," Brock noted as he stared out the windows of the gondola that was taking them up the side of the mountain. The ruins were on the highest peak in Michina Town, and according to his guide book, they were all that remained of an ancient, thriving city that claimed the mountain and the entire area as their own. The buildings there was actually the most well preserved ruins of an ancient city, even if there were older ones elsewhere in the world.

It wasn't just the history though. The vegetation and wildlife had long since claimed back the series of plateaus that made the mountain almost look like massive stairs, and it was absolutely breathtaking.

"I guess," Misty agreed, running her finger in patterns on the window where her breath fogged the glass. "Think they're up here?"

"Well, if they're not, they'll probably wind up coming here." He shrugged. "Look, you're here for the weekend, you might as well enjoy it."

Her brow furrowed and the brunette quickly realized that this was absolutely the wrong thing to say. Her shoulders tensed and her voice had a hard edge to it. "And hope that my sisters don't decide to just take off since I was supposed to be back by tonight?"

"You know he meant well."

She huffed but didn't say anything, choosing to keep whatever thoughts were running through her head to herself. Brock wasn't sure that he liked that, because he enjoyed helping his friends. The silence that followed made the gondola feel much more stifling than it actually was.

Movement suddenly caught Brock's attention. He looked over Misty's head and gasped. She looked up at him and then whipped around, finding what startled him almost instantly. Her hands slammed into the glass, palms resting against the cool surface as they watched a massive black hole appear below them, the water of a lake rising up and disappearing into it.

The gondola rocked a little more roughly, and while Brock suddenly wanted his two feet on the ground, he knew that it was safer to go up instead of trying to get the operators to bring it back down. They were closer to the peak.

"Brock?" Misty's voice wavered as she spoke. "What are the odds that Ash and Dawn are down there?"

His face faltered and his shoulders slumped slightly. "I wouldn't even take you up on that bet in the

first place."

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Dawn didn't mean to scream so loudly as her feet suddenly left the ground, being pulled up towards the sky. Her arms flailed out to grab onto anything to keep her anchored to the ground. Relief rushed through her as Ash shot around, grabbing onto her arms as he was slowly pulled across the slick, snow covered grass. With a yelp, he slipped, bringing her with him as he slammed into the ground.

They both almost lifted off the ground again from the sheer force of the wind when Ash held his hand out and grunted. There was a barely discernible flash before her eyes, and everything was still around them. Looking up at the trees around them, she could still see the wind whipping violently, but he was keeping them safe.

"No!" Ash cried out suddenly, and Dawn rolled over to look in his direction, horror rushing through her when she saw Pikachu and Piplup fly up into the air.

Pikachu flipped himself over, grabbing onto Piplup and yelling something that Dawn couldn't actually translate but understood a moment later. Piplup unleashed a powerful Bubblebeam at the waterspout, the opposing force enough to stop them from actually getting sucked inside.

"What do we do?" Dawn cried out as she stood up, feeling the protective barrier around them fall, no doubt from Ash's concentration shifting to the pokemon instead. "You have to get them out."

"I can—." Ash stopped talking abruptly, turning to look at something behind her. Dawn looked around, blinking with surprise as the strangely dressed young woman that hurried out of the woods, stopping beside them and staring up at the waterspouts. A young man with an outfit that was almost as strange followed her.

"What the hell?" Ash mumbled, brow furrowing with confusion as he stared at the new arrivals, though Dawn quickly realized he was focusing on the young woman. That look was on his face again, the one that told her he was suspicious and that there was something odd about this person.

"Come forth, Dialga, and save these pokemon for me!" She cried out suddenly, her bright blue eyes staring up at the sky with determination.

Dawn's mouth fell open and Ash's shoulders tensed as a glowing, blue portal appeared, and the Deity of Time himself flew out of it. The pokemon looked towards them, and if Dawn wasn't seeing things, it actually nodded in their direction before gliding into the sky.

Piplup ran out of bubbles, causing him and Pikachu to fly into the waterspout, Dialga hurrying after them. Dawn held her breath, watching as the pokemon circled the vortex several times. She almost slumped over with relief when she saw Piplup and Pikachu on his head.

Knowing her pokemon was safe, Dawn turned her attention back to the two newcomers. "How did she get Dialga to listen to her?"

"There's something different about her," Ash muttered quietly, eyes flickering from her to Pikachu and back again.

"What, like you?" Though she had met Riley, Dawn knew that meeting anyone who could use aura was incredibly rare. Meeting three would be completely mind blowing.

"No, not exactly." He looked back up as Dialga flew overhead, Pikachu and Piplup jumping off.

Dawn laughed in relief as she caught her pokemon, almost slipping on the cold ground. Ash gasped and she looked up just in time to see one of Dialga's devastating attacks race through the sky and slam into the vortex. It vanished and the waterspout crumpled.

"Oh no." Dawn didn't even have to ask why her raven-haired friend said that. They both took off up the side of one of the river banks, getting up high enough just in time to avoid the water that rushed back into the lake. Just like that, everything was still and calm again.

"Everything's alright now," the young woman said to them in an oddly calm voice. Dawn wanted to believe her, but that hope was instantly dashed when Ash looked towards the water with alarm. Sometimes she really hated the fact that her friend had the ability to sense weird things. A part of her would have liked to be oblivious from time to time.

The lake water started to ripple, and she expected it to rush back up to the sky, but instead, a red-rimmed portal appeared. This time, she needed no explanation. Dawn knew exactly who was coming.

"Giratina," Ash mumbled, and a second later, the legendary pokemon soared out of the portal. He wasted no time in heading up to the sky and attacking Dialga.

Instead of fighting, Dialga chose to flee instead but Giratina never gave the other legendary a chance. Dawn didn't know why Dialga didn't just fly through another portal, maybe they took some effort to make, but his hesitation allowed Giratina to slam him into the water.

In that moment, all she could see was Alamos Town falling apart as Dialga and Palkia fought. Dawn cringed, wanting to get as far away from there as she could.

"It's too dangerous!" the blond-haired man yelled at them, waving his arm towards the woods. "Get away, quick!" The woman just ignored them, staring at the quarreling creatures.

The young girl wanted to run, she really did, but she knew already that it wasn't going to happen if she wanted to stick with Ash. Sure enough, looking up at the teenage boy, Dawn could see him staring at the man oddly. He wasn't about to run away from this. For someone who claimed that he didn't want anything to do with being some legendary 'Chosen One', Ash never seemed to run from a fight, especially not one like this.

Giratina charged another attack, and Dawn found herself stepping forward against her own will, hugging Piplup tightly to her chest as she yelled, "Please, stop it Giratina!" Her words were unheeded as Giratina unleashed a blue fall of fire and slammed Dialga back into the water.

"Now transcend the confines of time and space." Dawn looked over at the woman, watching her clasp her hands together in front of them and close her eyes. Then she just stood still, not moving an inch.

"What the?" Ash looked confused again, his eyes darting from Giratina to the woman and back again. Whatever was going on, whatever she was doing, he must have been able to actually see it. "That's not going to work. Hold Pikachu for me." He pressed his pokemon into her arms without actually waiting for her to respond.

"Pikapi!" Pikachu cried out with alarm, but Ash wasn't listening anymore. Instead, he was running towards the edge of the water.

"Sheena!" Dawn looked around as the young woman was thrown back by some force that she couldn't see. The young man steadied her.

She shook her head. "It's rage is just too strong—get away from it!"

Feeling like she was going to get whiplash after this, Dawn looked back around to Ash, who was standing at the edge of the water, ignoring the woman's – Sheena's – warning.

"Giratina!" Ash yelled, holding a hand up to the air. "Giratina, it's okay! I know you're mad because of what happened but it's okay! I promise!"

Giratina slowly turned his attention away from Dialga, looking around at Ash. He cooed a bit, sounding much less frightening than when he was screeching at Dialga, tilting his head slightly before taking a step forward and lowering himself down. Dawn heard the two people gasp as Giratina actually got close enough for Ash to touch.

"Hey," Ash said, his voice warm and soothing. "See, I told you it was okay."

Dawn couldn't help but smile at the scene. If it was possible for such a big creature to puzzle someone so small in comparison, Giratina was certainly trying. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Dialga fly away, moving high into the sky and hovering there. She let herself release another breath that she didn't realize she was holding, her shoulders relaxing.

"Giratina's rage. It's gone," Sheena (Dawn was pretty sure that's what the young man called her) said, clasping her hands together again. "Now's the time. Transcend the confines of time and space."

Dawn watched her with interest. She muttered under her breath, but the young girl couldn't hear exactly what it was that she was saying.

"What are you doing?" Ash's voice startled all of them. He was frowning, standing almost defensively in front of the pokemon that dwarfed him.

"She was trying to tell Giratina that—."

"I heard what she said." Yes, he was definitely being defensive. Turning back away from them, he ran his hand over Giratina's golden crest, whispering something. The pokemon cooed, stretching out his massive wings and soaring into the sky, creating another portal in the water to fly back into the Distortion World.

"It looks like Giratina understood." The blond man said, putting his hands on his hips.

"That's nice if it's true, but I should have seen it in its' heart." The woman shook her head.

"Seen it in his heart?" Dawn repeated, carefully approaching them with Piplup and Pikachu in her arms. She could hear Ash's feet crunching against the snow as he walked up beside her.

"You see, I have the power to connect my heart to pokemon," Sheena clasped a single hand over her chest. "It's how I communicated with Dialga earlier." She smiled, and maybe Dawn was seeing things, but the smile didn't seem to meet the woman's eyes. "My name is Sheena and I'm a guardian of these ruins." She motioned up to the plateaus above them.

"Same here," the man nodded his head. "My name is Kevin. Are you hurt?"

"No, I'm fine." Dawn watched Pikachu jump out of her arms and into Ash's, scurrying up his arm to his shoulder. "My name's Dawn." She wasn't even sure if they heard, since Sheena jumped down to where Ash was, standing uncomfortably close to him. She reached out towards Pikachu, but Ash took a few steps away from her.

Sheena appeared startled by this, frowning slightly as she stared at Ash. He stared back, trying to keep his face straight but it was obvious that he was uncomfortable under such close scrutiny.

"Long ago, there was a thunder creature and its' master. They changed the fate of this town." She looked away before looking back at him with narrowed eyes. "I thought the boy that came to the ruins the other day might have been..." She shook her head. "What did you think I told Giratina?"

Ash stared at her, clearly uncomfortable. Dawn slid down the small hill, standing beside him in the hopes that her presence might make him feel a bit better. She wasn't Misty, but she was his friend. The blue-haired girl was relieved when it seemed to work and he kept talking. "You told him that he misunderstood Dialga. Asked him not to fight."

"That's right," Sheena's shoulders rose as she breathed out. "How can you know that?"

Ash didn't answer, his eyes flickering to the ground. Dawn frowned at the woman, because it took Ash months to tell her about his abilities and they were friends.

"It's none of your—." Dawn didn't get to finish the tirade that was brewing inside of her. Ash's head jerked up towards the sky, his expression clearly concerned. "Ash?"

"It's happening again."

...

Brock watched Misty warily, because he was sure that she was going to have some sort of panic-rage attack. Seeing the legendary pokemon appear below them took away any of the interest or beauty that the ruins held. Instead, they acted as walls to hold onto as they watched the pokemon fight below.

Luckily, it stopped quickly enough, but that did little to help their nerves. Misty's fingers were clasping onto one of the brick walls so tightly, that Brock was positive her fingers must be white under her gloves.

"Brock," her voice wavered with a horrified desperation, and he could see why. It was like the air between where they were and where Ash and Dawn most likely were was rippling, turning into that same ominous shade as the vortex from earlier. "They need to get out of there! We have to do something!"

"Like what? We're way up here." He motioned downwards. "There's no way we could get there on time to help with...whatever this is."

"I was going to ask you if you guys knew what the hell was going on, but apparently you have no idea either," someone spoke up from behind them. Slightly startled, Brock jumped a bit, his fingers grasping onto the stone walls of the ruins. Misty looked behind him, ready to tell off whoever it was, but her insults instantly died on her lips. Instead, she just stared with a raised eyebrow.

Realizing that the voice was a familiar one, Brock turned around to see exactly who it was. He instantly knew why Misty would look surprised, because he was staring at one of the last people he expected to see around there.

After all, what were the odds that, right when things were starting to get crazy, Gary Oak would be in Michina Town?

Chapter End Notes

Introducing character number five (since apparently I always need five for some unknown reason): Mr. Gary Oak. Some people guessed it'd be him, others guessed Paul. Having Paul would have been interesting, especially since someone pointed out that the battle where Ash was basically trashed by him would have happened just before this (he still lost in this universe, just so you know), so that would have made for a lot of hard feelings under stress. Lets face it, Ash really hasn't been handling this type of stress very well in the last few fics. But it was always meant to be Gary in this fic and I wasn't changing that.

I'm actually having fun writing Dawn and Brock's point of views. Especially since it meant much more Brock and Misty interaction. Seriously, some people could dare to say that I've added hints for pearlshipping or gymshipping but that was not the case. It's really more like two sets of siblings (that's what I've been seeing it as).

Again, just so everyone knows I have my tumblr account for this series (as well as random shipping/other pokemon things at times), and sometimes I'll always try to answer questions there. Sometimes I'll have little updates on my writing that might hint what I'm working on. The url is <http://theroadyouchoose.tumblr.com>

Hope you guys enjoyed this chapter! It's much more inline with the movie!

Til next time!

Written by: Skylight Sparkle

Edited by: CLAVUS

A Long Time Ago

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Ash's words and the rippling sky above them was too late of a warning. The dark vortex appeared once again, pulling the water up into the air in a violent waterspout that lashed out at Dialga. The pokemon cried out in alarm, trying to get away, but was pulled inside of the swirling waters.

Dawn was watching with pure horror as the deity of time was engulfed in the watery tornado, not paying attention to anything else around her. She flinched as a loud cracking sound echoed through the air.

"Look out!" Kevin yelled, and the next thing Dawn knew, the young man scooped her up and jumped down to where Ash and Sheena were. She was too stunned to react as he set her down, watching an entire tree rip up the ground that she had been standing on seconds ago, flinging dirt, grass and snow up into the air.

Her entire body was shaking as she grabbed Ash's arm, both of them watching Kevin hurry up towards Sheena. "We need to leave before we get sucked into the waterspout."

Sheena stared at him for a moment before looking up at the waterspout. "But Dialga..." She trailed off, but even if she wanted to say whatever it was she was thinking, it didn't matter. The waterspout actually lunged towards them much quicker than they could move out of the way.

Dawn felt Ash tense. He was breathing rapidly, eye darting around and his hand was slowly opening and closing. Like he wanted to help but had no idea how to go about doing it.

Without warning, a portal glowing with a faint, pink light appeared and the familiar, high-pitched cry of Palkia echoed through the air. The legendary pokemon who was said to rule space actually shoved the waterspout back out of the way before generating pink, brightly glowing energy on his arm, creating a powerful arc of light that sliced through the water. Then, he flew up higher, creating a pink sphere that surrounded what was left of the vortex and waterspout that held onto Dialga. The vortex vanished, and the water fell back to the lake, freeing Dialga.

The blue-haired girl almost wanted to urge Ash to run. The last time these two pokemon came face to face had been just short of a catastrophe. Instead of the angry cries and the clashing of attacks, the air was filled with thankful and happy coos and cries, the two pokemon circling through the air. They stared at them before flying up and disappearing through their own portals.

"Oh thank Mew," Dawn breathed out, her knees feeling like jello. "I thought they were going to fight again."

"You were there, when they fought before?" Sheena asked them, her blue eyes regarding them carefully. "Can you tell us what you saw there? From the inside?"

"We were there," Ash said hesitantly, shifting uncomfortably for some reason.

"Pikapi," Pikachu muttered, nuzzling his face.

Ash smiled, petting Pikachu and then nodded at Sheena, expression serious and set. "We'll tell you what we know if you tell us what's going on here."

Dawn watched as Sheena and Kevin exchanged looks before they both nodded. "Come to the ruins," the young woman urged them. "We'll explain everything."

...

Never before had the young girl been so relieved to see a gondola. Despite what some people thought, she was learning how to handle her fair share of hikes. Sometimes it was hard to keep up with Ash and especially Brock, since they were both taller than she was and could walk faster, but Dawn was stubborn and wasn't going to let something simple like leg length leave her in the dust. Some people questioned her choice of traveling with two guys who were so much older than her, but she saw Ash and Brock almost like older brothers. They taught her so much, not just about pokémon or battling, but survival in general.

Just because she could climb up the mountainside didn't mean that she wanted to, not with the way her legs felt like they were going to collapse beneath her at any moment. She was even more excited to see that the gondola had seats.

Ash sat on the bench beside her, staring up at the ruins as the cable car slowly reached the top. He looked so thoughtful that Dawn was tempted to ask him what was on his mind. It wasn't that she thought Ash couldn't think or was stupid, but she knew that he tended to get himself worked up or stressed if he over-thought something. Ash Ketchum definitely wasn't book smart, but Dawn admired the fact that he was quick on his feet, spinning surprisingly feasible plans at a moment's notice.

When the cable car came to a stop, she sighed, not really wanting to get up. Sheena and Kevin were already on the move, walking out the door and into the cold ruins. The buildings were beautiful in an eerie kind of way, with faded, intricate carvings in most of the stone.

The sound of footsteps coming towards them startled Dawn, but a huge smile spread across her lips when she saw two familiar figures hurrying towards them. "Brock! Misty!"

"Thank Mew you two are okay," Brock sighed in relief, his hand falling to her shoulder. "We saw everything from up here."

Dawn nodded her head, looking over at Ash to explain since probably had a bit of a better idea of what was going on than she did. The sides of her lips ticked upwards again as she looked just in time to see Misty throw her arms over Ash's shoulders, hugging him tightly. He didn't hesitate to return the gesture with just as much force.

In that brief moment, Dawn thought that everything would be okay, but that hope was dashed just as quickly as it grew.

"You idiot," Misty snapped, taking a step back from Ash. "We were worried sick! What were you thinking? Running around trying to be the hero again?"

He took a step back from her, folding his arms across his chest and glaring. "It's not like we planned to run into Giratina, Dialga and Palkia. It just happened." His words were true, and if his tone was different, Dawn could have actually seen it calming Misty down in the slightest. Instead, his voice was angry, biting and accusing, and that was clearly the only thing the redhead picked up on.

The tension in the air was so thick that Dawn was physically uncomfortable. Just from the way they were glaring at each other, she knew that they were about to explode in yet another yelling match. From the way Brock shifted beside her, she figured that he knew this too. He was frowning

and tense, ready to actually jump in to stop them this time.

"As much as I'd love to see a Skitty-fight, I'd like to know what's going on." The sarcastic, male voice surprised Dawn. She looked at the arch way Brock and Misty had come through earlier, more than a bit surprised to see Gary Oak. He raised an eyebrow, dark green eyes flickering between Ash and Misty with interest and amusement.

"What are you doing here?" Shock aside, Dawn could have kissed Gary at that moment, because Ash's frustration almost instantly vanished as he stepped around the still-fuming redhead, tilting his head curiously.

"Studying the ruins." He shrugged and motioned towards the walls, his grey, button-up jacket bunching slightly with the movements. "Not nearly as exciting as meeting a bunch of Legendary Pokemon though."

"Oh, you saw that?" Ash rubbed the back of his head, a sheepish smile on his face.

"Hard not to," Gary shrugged and glanced over at Sheena. His gaze was oddly calculating. From what Ash told her, Dawn knew that Gary didn't like being confused or left out of the loop. "Wanna explain what's going on?"

Realizing that they all knew each other and there wasn't any huge problems with Gary coming with them, Sheena nodded her head and said, "Follow me."

Brock followed Sheena and Kevin closely, torn between looking at the ruins and staring longingly at her. Surprisingly, Ash fell in step with Gary, though they didn't actually say anything to one another. At least they weren't arguing. Dawn wasn't sure if she could take much more of that.

The blue-haired chose to walk beside Misty as they walked through a massive set of roped off doors. The older girl had her arms folded across her chest, both sad and angry at the same time.

"Hey," she nudged the redhead gently. "He didn't mean anything by it, how he got mad earlier, you know that."

"And I was just worried," Misty said, her voice defensive but not nearly as angry as it was when she was speaking to Ash himself.

"It didn't seem that way," Dawn admitted, even if it almost terrified her. Misty's temper, though grossly exaggerated by both Brock and Ash, was something to be feared. "You sounded just angry about it. Like you were nitpicking."

Misty looked towards her, expression softening a bit. She sighed and shook her head. "I know, I know. He just drives me crazy."

"Well, there's no need to worry," she replied optimistically. "Everything will work out!"

The green-eyed girl chuckled a little bit as they started walking across strong, steel walkways, nothing but more stairs and a deep, dark pit beyond that. "That's nice, Dawn, but it doesn't always work like that. Things don't always fix themselves. Sometimes you have to try and fix it yourself, even if it means you could end up breaking it entirely."

Dawn decided that she really didn't like that metaphor.

"So, I see you met Brows."

Dawn and Misty both looked up at Gary, who was talking to Ash. The raven-haired boy tilted his head, and neither of them had to see his face to know that he was confused. "Who?"

It was subtle, but Gary nodded towards Sheena. "How did you not notice? Not only does she dress weird, but her eyebrows are the size of a Caterpie."

Misty's mouth fell open with surprise, and Dawn glared at Gary's back, affronted for the young woman that had no idea someone was talking about her behind her back. They exchanged perplexed looks when Ash actually snorted with amusement that he was clearly trying to hide. It wasn't like him to make fun a person in such a way, even if he didn't actually say anything.

Prompted by Ash's response, Gary became a little more animated, his ego slipping into his voice. "No really, she started calling me and Electivire 'thunder creature and creature master', like we were from some old legend. Really, it's flattering, but couldn't she just say I'm a trainer with an electric-type pokemon."

"Oh! So you're the other person she meant." Ash motioned to Pikachu. "She said the same thing about me and Pikachu."

"Eh, why would some legend talk about you? It was definitely me."

Dawn almost laughed out loud. If Leaf spoke to Gary at all since she left them a few months ago, she hadn't mention Ash's unique abilities or the title that he apparently carried. If there was some sort of legend or prophecy hanging around, Ash had much better odds of it referring to him.

"Hey, if you want it to be about you, go for it." Ash shrugged in a casual way, but there was more to his voice. They all knew that Ash didn't want the 'Chosen One' title, that he preferred to play stupid over it.

"I can't believe we're under the ruins," Brock's voice echoed back to them, and the four trainers instantly looked up towards where he, Sheena and Kevin were waiting.

"Those ruins up there are the public ones," Kevin explained. "There's so much more to everything, but some things are best kept away from prying eyes." He pushed open a large, steel door that screeched painfully against their ears. "Things like this."

Sheena silently led the way across the room to a very strange object. It was an old machine that creaked and clattered as it moved. In a way, it reminded Dawn of the Space Tower back in Alamos Town. There were two massive orbs, identical in shape and size, but one was green and the other one was red. They were pressed against one another. Spinning around them on opposites sides were two smaller orbs, one blue and one pink. It looked like they were supposed to be moving around on opposite sides, but they kept catching up to one another and colliding. The biggest orb was a golden colour that was moving haphazardly.

"What is that?" Dawn asked, tilting her head slightly.

"It's the Time-Space Axis," Sheen said, obvious reverence in her voice as she motioned to it.

"The Time-Space Axis?" Gary repeated, his voice almost skeptical. "Seriously? How could that be working still?"

"You've heard about it?" Misty wondered, raising an eyebrow.

"I've read about it, but I didn't think it was real," Gary explained. "It supposedly indicates the condition of every minute change in the time-space continuum."

"What?" Ash didn't even try to hide how confused he was, staring at Gary as if the other boy had grown another head.

"Right, sorry. People with an IQ of 25 are around." Ash glared at him but if the brunet noticed it, he didn't care. "It means if time or space mess up or break, it'll react. Understand that."

"Oh." Ash clearly wasn't happy with Gary's dig at his intelligence, and Pikachu glared at the other trainer to convey his displeasure as well. The brown-eyed boy decided to let it go, staring at the Time-Space Axis. "I've seen something like this before, but how can it tell you anything?"

"You're mistaken, this is one of a kind." Kevin shook his head, blond strands of hair falling in his eyes as he did. "We've searched the world for something similar. We had no such luck."

"It would be helpful too, because we use this to monitor disruptions in time and space," Sheena explained, looking at them one at a time. "If there were more, it'd be easier to get to different places where disruptions happen. We've missed a lot of things lately."

"Disruptions?" Brock repeated, his voice wavering slightly, though Dawn didn't understand why.

"Yes, for instance, the strange mutations of Alamos Town." She tensed up as Kevin mentioned that. "The whole town vanished, and then it changed and reappeared like nothing happened. We talked to people there afterwards and they explained that Palkia and Dialga were fighting, but the song from the Space-Time Towers stopped them."

"Oracion," Misty breathed out so only Dawn could hear. The young girl nodded her head, remembering the soothing melody of the song with ease. They were the ones who actually got it to play at the time while Brock was trying to help Nurse Joy and the other people, May was beating up Baron Alberto, and Ash decided it'd be a good time to fly around on the back of an angry legendary pokemon.

"I heard that there were strange disruptions of the contest there," Gary nodded his head. "Never heard that Legendary Pokemon showed up though."

"Most of the time, you won't," Kevin explained. "Leagues go out of their way to hush things like that up, to protect the Legendaries so no one else goes after them."

"Alamos Town wasn't the only place something strange happened," Sheena added. "A couple months ago something very strange happened by the Sinnoh Glaciers. Experts said that they actually moved quite a bit, and while most people don't know why, we believe it had to do with Giratina."

They would be absolutely correct.

"So," Ash took a couple steps towards the strange sculpture, looking at the different orbs. "What do these all mean anyway?"

"This green orb here is our world," Sheena pointed at it before motioning to the red one. "It's supported by the Distortion World, or the Reverse World as some know it. The blue and pink spheres represent time and space, Palkia and Dialga's domains." She motioned to the largest one. "And here, we have Arceus' personal dimension, though in reality, they all belong to Him."

"Arceus?" Misty glanced down at Dawn, who flushed a bit from her startled cry.

"Who or what is Arceus?" The redhead demanded. "A pokemon?"

Dawn was actually a bit surprised that Misty didn't know who Arceus was, but from the confused look on Ash's face, he had no idea either.

"Yes and no," Sheena shook her head, frowning at them. "Legend says that Arceus was the one who created this entire world. That He existed long before anything else did. He created everything, including all the pokemon and us. Then He chose the pokemon to rule time, space, the distortion world, the seas, the skies, everything."

"He...chose them?" Ash looked around at the young woman, trying to keep a straight face. His expression wavered, and if Dawn didn't know any better, she'd say that he looked afraid.

"That's what the legends say," Kevin nodded his head.

"There's an omen that predicts Arceus will awaken from his long slumber."

"Long slumber?" Ash's question was ignored by both of the adults.

"Massive whirlpools of energy, like you saw outside. They're distorting time and space, which is what brought Dialga and Palkia's worlds together and continues to do so. Two world that were supposed to be eternally separated." She motioned to the two spheres as they collided again.

"Two entities that never should have met cross paths in the space-time rift," Misty whispered suddenly, as if reading straight from a book.

"Tonio's journal," Dawn breathed out.

"They fought," Kevin explained for Sheena, completely missing the exchange the two girls had. "In turn, that effected the Reverse World and Giratina lashed out at both of them."

"But those conflicts were solved, weren't they?" Brock asked, brow furrowing with worry.

"Yeah. You talked to them out there and they all seemed alright," Dawn motioned behind her. "Palkia even saved Dialga."

"If only that were true. It wasn't just those two incidences. It's been happening for a long time now, but it's gotten worse over the past four years or so." Sheena shook her head and stared at the spheres. "Now more than ever, you hear of people forming different Teams, lashing out at legendary pokemon and people. Legendary Pokemon themselves are much more on edge and quick to fight. You might not remember, but years ago there was an incident in the Orange Islands with the legendary birds there. In the past, they were able to settle their own conflicts, not jumping to violence as they did that time. That's just one example."

Ash and Misty both tensed, exchanging knowing expressions without any bitterness at all. Dawn didn't quite understand what that meant, but she'd bet Piplup that they were in the Orange Islands when that happened. If Ash truly was the Chosen One, that would be the type of thing that he'd have to deal with.

The golden sphere suddenly jerked, startling all of them, it lowered substantially, almost hitting the one that represented their world.

"What just happened?" Gary was the one who voiced the question they were all thinking. Dawn didn't know him all that well, they only met a few times before, but even she could pick up how wary and skeptical he sounded. Clearly he wasn't buying any of these stories.

"We've been using the alter to pinpoint the moment when Arceus will appear," Kevin explained,

motioning towards the orbs again, unable to hide the worry in his voice.

"Wouldn't it be a good thing if Arceus came back?" Ash asked. Dawn was thinking the same thing. She could remember Shaymin saying something about a parental figure that was gone for a very long time. If it was Arceus that she had been referring to back then, him coming back could be good for all the Legendary Pokemon.

"I wish it were so." Sheena's head tilted towards the floor as she closed her eyes, hands curling up into fists. "The problem is that he holds a grudge against humanity." Her eyes opened again, staring at them all seriously. "Arceus remains intent on bringing us all to justice."

"Pika?" Pikachu curled around Ash's shoulder, ears twitching curiously. Dawn wondered if he knew anything that she was talking about. The pokemon already proved to know more about the world than they shared, not that many people bothered asking them.

"Justice?" Misty voiced the question that they were all thinking. They all wanted to know exactly what that meant.

"Yes, justice," Sheena repeated in a monotone voice as she brushed by them. "It's possible that Arceus will destroy us entirely." Just the way she spoke was so accepting, like the voice of someone who had long accepted her fate.

"Why?" There was so much anger in Ash's voice that it actually startled all of them. His hand was clenched in a fist, and if looks could kill, Sheena and Kevin probably would have been ashes on the floor. Dawn was really glad that if Aura came with some sort of laser eyes, he clearly couldn't harness that power. "What did you do to him to make him so angry?"

Sheena eyed them all before motioning towards the back of the room where several flickering lanterns were lit up. There were intricate carvings on the walls of twisting pictures forming a giant mural, neat carvings of words running around the images.

"Huh, I've never seen this language before," Gary said, staring at the walls with narrowed eyes. "And I've been to a lot of dig sites. Most ancient languages tend to look like Unown."

"That's very true, but these ruins are some of the oldest, in-tact ones in the world. Officially, this language is undecipherable, but we've had the key for it for a very long time." Kevin shook his head. "What we have here is just too dangerous to share with the world."

That didn't sound good at all. It made Dawn think of the fresh grass and plants, as well as the energy Ash claimed was running through the entire town.

Sheena pointed to a part of the wall that had a strange creature facing what looked like a giant, spiked ball. "Part of the legend is well known in this town. When it appeared that fragments from the stars would destroy much of the world, Arceus sacrificed itself in order to fend off the danger."

"It stopped meteors from hitting the Earth?" Brock clarified. The young woman nodded and he looked back at the walls. "Wow. What an incredible pokemon."

"Arceus had been carrying 16 life-plates around with it that it could counter all possible attacks," Kevin added, pointing to the markings around the creature in the carving. "It lost the life plates in the collision with the meteors, making it's death a near certainty."

The image that they were by now showed the creature laying on a mountain top, the small figure of a man carrying something up the side of it. "Then," Sheena continued, "Arceus was saved by a man named Damos, who returned the life plates to their rightful owner." Her fingers brushed over

the runes and images of what looked like mountains and rocks. "Back then, Michina was little more than a wasteland spreading out over the land. But when Arceus saw this, it was overcome with pity. So it removed the powers of water, grass, ground and electricity from the life plates, and on top of that, dragon for protection. It then combined them into one, create the Jewel of Life." Sheena motioned to a sphere that was carved with the upmost care.

"The Jewel of Life." Ash breathed out, sounding like he almost knew the term, though Dawn knew that wasn't possible. He was just as clueless as the rest of them were.

"Yes. Arceus trusted Daemos and bestowed upon him the Jewel of Life, even though this meant putting its own life in great danger. Arceus' magnificent strength flowed out of the Jewel of Life, turning that wasteland of Michina into a fertile paradise." She looked towards them all. "That's the legend that everyone here knows."

"That's a nice story and all," Gary said, crossing his arms in front of him. "But nobody has ever been able to prove that Arceus existed at all. We know all pokémon came from Mew."

"And who created Mew?" Misty challenged him. Gary appeared unimpressed and looked ready to argue, but Sheena cut in again.

"That's the legend that everyone knows. What we keep hidden here, is the rest of it."

"The rest of it?" Dawn repeated, tilting her head slightly.

"Yes. The day came when Damos was to return the Jewel of life. The day when the moon covered the sun." She pointed up above them where someone carved a picture of a sun and a moon overlapping.

"A solar eclipse," Brock clarified.

"Yes." She nodded her head. "However, Damos broke his promise, and instead of returning the Jewel of Life, he attacked Arceus."

Ash's entire body tensed, Brock looked down at the floor, Misty glared at the carving of Damos, Dawn gasped and Gary just stared at them all like they were the strangest things he had ever come across.

"Why would he do that?" Dawn asked, her voice shaky and sad. "Why would they hurt any pokémon that way?"

"Well," Sheena looked back at them. "Damos believed that if he were to return the jewel, this area would go back to being an uncultivated wasteland." She clasped her hands in front of her.

"Feeling profoundly betrayed, Arceus fell into a rage and destroyed this shrine. Then, in order to heal itself from its injuries, Arceus began a long sleep," Kevin finished.

Everyone was still for a moment before Ash shook his head, taking his hat off and squeezing it in one hand while the other brushed through his dark hair. He took a deep breath and looked at the guardians of the ruins. He was trying to keep a straight face, but his anger was still showing through. "So one guy decided that this little place was more important than anything else? Than the other Legendary Pokémons? They're all lost, angry and confused and it's all because of him!"

"You're taking this awfully personally." Gary noted, eyeing his childhood friend warily. This was a side of Ash that he obviously hadn't seen many times before, even if it was one that Dawn and everyone else was becoming very familiar with as of late.

Ash didn't say anything, watching Sheena walk over to a small alter, taking a flower-shaped, metal object off of the top. "Damos is my ancestor."

The others exclaimed with surprise, Brock sounding like he was being strangled. She walked back over to them, holding out the object with one hand and tapping the top of it with the other. The metal pieces unfolded like a flower, revealing a strange glass sphere. It looked like it was green, but blues and yellows flashed through it, glowing and changing. "And this is the Jewel of Life."

They all just stared at it with gobsmacked expressions. The only exception was Ash, who stared at the jewel like it had come to life and was cracking terrible jokes that only he could hear. For all they knew, something that powerful could be doing that and only Ash would realize it.

"It's real," Gary muttered, disbelief peppering his voice. He left out a huff of air, running his fingers through his spiky brown locks. "That whole story, it was all real?"

"You're willing to accept it now?" Misty raised an eyebrow at him.

"There's proof right here," Gary snapped at her. "I mean, this thing must be the reason why all the plants grow here, even in winter? Right?"

"Yes." Sheena nodded her head. "That's right."

"Are you sure?" Ash sounded so skeptical that it surprised even Pikachu. He squinted his bright brown eyes, moving closer and taking in the jewel as much as he could. Then, before anyone could stop him, he picked it up.

"Ash!" Brock scolded him.

"Don't!" Sheena cried out, alarmed. She dared not try to grab it out of his hands though, in fear that he would drop it.

"This is a fancy glass orb. There's nothing special about it," Ash rolled it from one hand to the other, taking a couple steps from Kevin who was coming dangerously close to him.

"You're wrong," Sheena argued with him, blue eyes narrowed and actually angry. "Return thus to Arceus, the Jewel of Life. Placate its rage, lets destruction visit this land. See, it is written. It's a message to us from our ancestors. Our ancestors realized their mistake and now we must return the Jewel of Life to Arceus so that we may calm its wrath."

"I believe that," Ash nodded his head, holding the jewel more securely in his hands. "I believe you want to give him, but this is a glass ball." He frowned at them.

Misty suddenly groaned, slapping her hand to her face. Dawn looked up at her, gasping in realization as Misty said, "That energy's not going to it, is it?"

"There's no energy in this thing at all. Just some fancy special effects," Ash agreed.

"Pokemon attacks could do that," Brock added with a frown. "It's entirely possible."

"How would you know?" Gary demanded, green eyes suspiciously gazing at the other Pallet native. "You've never even heard of it before."

Ash bit his lip, maybe realizing that he backed himself into a bit of a corner. Dawn desperately tried to think of an excuse for her friend, but he just sighed. "Look, you wanted our side of the story too, didn't you? About Palkia and Dialga?" He aimed that question at Kevin and Sheena, who were

both watching him like suspicious Murkrows. They clearly forgot about that. "We were there because we were the ones that stopped it. We helped Giratina too and you said yourself that it's all connected, right? Well, we're here now because this place has a really strange energy here." He shrugged. "It's just flowing everywhere but it does go to something. I can't pinpoint what. I know it's not this. There's no power in this. Nothing like what you're describing or what I feel." He let out a deep breath as he stopped talking, having spouted all of that out as quickly as he could before someone interrupted him.

"How do you know?" Sheena asked.

Ash hesitated, looking back at them unsurely. Dawn was confused, while Brock shrugged, but Misty nodded her head. Ash held the jewel in one hand, his other palm held out flat in front of him. A tiny, glowing sphere of light appeared above his palm, hovering and not doing anything else. "My Aura lets me see different kinds of power and energy too because it's all connected and I don't even understand it. What I do understand is that there's nothing here. This is a fake."

Chapter End Notes

Several people have wondered why Ash was so defensive when Sheena tried to reach out to Giratina. Just because you don't see his thoughts on it doesn't make it obvious. Any time someone's messed with the legendary pokemon in any way, something bad has happened and I've established in the past that he's really getting tired of their BS. Plus there's the fact that this isn't the first time you've seen that specific power Sheena has in this specific series.

Also he's being a little bit of a confrontational jerk at the moment. Think about him in the canon when he and Misty really get each other riled up and angry. They're both very likely to snap at other people (Brock) too. They're older here but given the situation, being a bit cranky isn't out there. They're teenagers they need a little bit of teen angst (I'm kidding).

Gary was always meant to be the fifth character here. His connection to Ash's past, the fact that he's the most obvious choice of 'who would hang around ruins for giggles', plus the fact that he actually shows up in Sinnoh anyway, made him my only choice. Plus I had Leaf last time, it only seemed right to bring him in too. Oh and just so everyone's clear: Gary and Leaf are NOT dating in this. That is all.

Hope you guys enjoy this chapter!

Written by: Skylight Sparkle

Edited by: CLAVUS

Lacking Faith

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

From a young age, Gary Oak had been the pride of Pallet Town. Deemed as smarter than average from a young age, he had money, a big home, lots of friends, an awesome, famous grandfather, two parents and an aunt. It might have seemed like a strange thing to feel proud about, having family members, but considering the fact that Ash and Leaf both only had their mothers, and Leaf spent more time at Ash's house than her own as it was, he was very proud of that.

He always knew he'd be one of the trainers to leave home when he was ten. He always knew that he would do great things. He just didn't realize exactly what those great things would be at the time. That childish part of him that he vowed to leave behind sometimes still reared its ugly head, telling him that he was better than all of his friends, rivals and acquaintances. Gary always knew that Leaf was just as smart as he was, though she seemed to flounder with what she wanted to do with herself. He always knew that Ash, while more determined than anyone else he'd ever met, was nothing special. A small part of him still carried those beliefs around with him to that very day.

Staring at the glowing sphere actually hovering over Ash's outstretched hand, the other boy might as well have thrown it in his face. Gary loved studying ancient and extinct pokemon, and learning about the human part of the past only made his understanding of those times all that better. He read about Aura and Aura Guardians and knew just how rare they were in modern times.

Yet the little kid who walked into a glass wall in a fun house, getting a massive nose-bleed in the process, apparently had it all along. If he wasn't seeing the Aura Sphere himself, Gary probably would have laughed in someone's face if they told him that Ash Ketchum had Aura.

At least that answered why Ash was claiming that the Jewel of Life was fake. It opened a slew of other questions though.

"Who thought it was a good idea to give you that power?" Gary deadpanned before he could stop himself.

"We don't talk about that," Ash shot back sarcastically as the Aura Sphere vanished. He reached out, handing the orb back to a stunned Sheena. "The real Jewel of Life must be around here somewhere. This whole place is a hotspot with that weird power."

"You can't pinpoint it?" Misty asked him.

"If I could find it don't you think I would have told them that?" Ash eyed her warily, tensing up like he was just waiting for a fight. It was a subconscious reaction that Gary was very familiar with from all of their arguments in the past.

Misty took a step towards him and the brunet was so sure that he was going to see them rip right into each other just from their expressions alone, but a loud clanging instantly drew their attention back towards the alter. The golden orb fell, hitting the blue and pink ones before slamming into the green orb. In turn, the green sphere slammed into the red one and they all clattered to the floor.

"Maybe I'm stating the obvious," Gary quipped sarcastically. "But that can't be good."

"Arceus is coming." Sheena told them bluntly, staring at the glass orb with disdain. "We have no time to find the real Jewel of Life. If this is a fake."

They all stared at one another tensely before Dawn suddenly perked up. "What if we looked while you distract him a bit?"

"Distract the pokemon that created the world?" Gary asked sarcastically, trying to hide his amusement at the way she puffed up her cheeks and glared at him. Her expression reminded him so much of 10-year-old Ash that he actually had to force himself not to laugh. It wasn't the appropriate situation to laugh at, but this whole thing kind of felt ridiculous to him.

"It's the best plan we've got," Kevin finally said. "You could be wrong. This could be the jewel but you might not be able to sense the power, it could be beyond you." Ash actually looked offended by that. "Either way, we need to get back up to the surface. He's coming now."

Just the way Kevin spoke had to be the most ominous thing Gary heard all day.

...

Despite the fact that it was the dead of winter, it had been a really nice day when Gary descended into the depths of the ruins along with Ash, Misty, Brock and Dawn. The sun had been gleaming in a bright blue, almost cloudless sky. Not that he was the type to enjoy the scenery or anything like that. It just worked out really well for him because it lit up parts of the ruins that were previously shadowed and hidden from him.

His first thought when they exited was to wonder how long they had been down there. The clouds in the sky were so dark that it almost looked like it was night outside. The teenager pushed up the sleeve of his coat to glance at his watch on his Poketech, a bit surprised to see that it was still very early in the day.

Gary glanced over as Ash came up beside him, his face pale as he looked at the sky. His expression reminded the brunet of the time back in second grade when the raven-haired boy actually ended up breaking an arm in gym class and just sat there, staring in shock and horror.

"We're going up to the highest point of the ruins," Sheena told them, holding the orb and the protective container it was in close to her chest. "We will wait for Arceus there." Without so much as a glance back towards them, she ran up the stairs, Kevin hurrying after her.

Ash watched them go, crossing his arms in front of him. "They don't believe me. They think I'm wrong about that stupid glass orb."

"What do you think will happen if they try to give it to Arceus?" Brock wondered aloud, looking around as if the answer would be right in front of them.

"Nothing good. That's why we need to find the Jewel of Life, and we need to find it now." Ash looked around, almost like he was deciding where to go.

Gary liked to think that he was very adaptable, that he could jump into any situation and come out on top. When he woke up that morning in the Pokemon Center, much earlier than anyone else, he expected to spend the day leisurely studying the ruins, maybe training his pokemon a little bit. He wasn't a competitive battler anymore, but he never let his pokemon get rusty, for their own sake.

Then he saw those weird portals, ran into Ash's friends and then the boy himself, learned that there was a magical jewel that gave life to the town that came from a pokemon the brunet wasn't even sure he believed in, and now said pokemon was coming to judge them all. On top of that, the goofball that he had known all his life apparently had one of the rarest gifts a human could possibly have.

It wasn't even lunch time yet.

Adding onto all of that, none of Ash's friends were batting an eye at the strangeness of the situation. They were all just rolling with it. Gary was a naturally curious person, he genuinely liked to learn, so he definitely wasn't going to back away from this whole situation, even if he thought it was ridiculous.

"Where do we even start looking?" Dawn called out as they descended the slippery stone stairs.
"You said that you couldn't find it."

"Well, it's like...okay you know that time you lost your clip in the tall grass?" She nodded. "We knew it was there somewhere, but we had no idea where. Same idea. I know it's here somewhere." Ash pointed down at where they had been earlier when the legendary pokémon appeared. "The energy was weaker down there. Up here it's all bright and..."

"Concentrated?" Misty suggested.

"Yeah." He nodded at her. "So it's up here somewhere."

"Okay, not to sound like the newbie here, even though I clearly am since you guys aren't freaking out about any of this, but they've been excavating these ruins for well over 50 years now and that's just officially. Wouldn't someone have found it by now?" Gary raised an eyebrow at them.

"People tried," Brock answered, surprising him as they finally made it onto solid ground, looking at everything that they walked by carefully. "Some kids from the town told us that a lot of people have been looking for whatever gave this place life but never found it."

"Okay, but you have to admit, this is ridiculous," Gary pointed out, trying to urge them to see what he was seeing. He couldn't help but feel annoyed because he could see Ash overlooking the obvious, and perhaps Dawn since she seemed to be a lot like his childhood friend, but he thought Brock and Misty were smarter. "It was lost thousands of years ago. It could be in the ground somewhere for all we know."

"So what, you expect us not to look?" Misty demanded, turning around to face him with a scowl on her face. "The pokémon that apparently created the universe is coming to destroy us all or something like that. Whatever 'bestow judgment on us' means."

Gary breathed out angrily, green eyes flashing as he turned to Ash. The other boy had gone oddly silent during the small spat, something uncommon for him. The raven-haired boy wasn't even paying attention to them. His eyes were locked onto the distant sky, wide with horror. "Ketchum?"

"It doesn't matter," Ash finally said, though his voice was barely louder than a whisper. "We're already too late."

Just as the words left his lips, there was a silent explosion of light in the distance. It was so bright against the darkened sky that they all had to cover their eyes, waiting until it faded away. When it was gone, the world only seemed darker.

There was a figure in the distance, a golden glow surrounding its entire body, though it was hard to actually make out what it was beyond the glow. It suddenly started to move forward, and Ash flinched back.

"Woah, easy," Brock grabbed his shoulder.

"It hurts to look at him," Ash mumbled, keeping his eyes locked on the ground. "He's so bright."

"We can see it," the young man assured him. "The gold glow, right?"

"You can actually see his Aura?" Ash looked so dumbfounded that Gary almost laughed, but there was something about this whole situation that prevented that.

"Yeah, why sound so surprised about it?" Dawn tilted her head as she regarded him, her eyes flickering to the slowly moving creature in the distance.

"I always see everything's Aura, I just ignore it." He looked back up towards the sky and Gary finally registered what he was seeing. As much as he always teased Ash, one thing that the brunet knew for a fact was that the other boy was almost foolishly brave. Seeing the brown-eyed boy so frightened didn't sit well with him at all.

Arceus, if that's what this creature in the sky really was, stopped over the town, not moving for several moments.

A beam of golden light shot up into the air and it was like the sky exploded over their heads. Heat rippled in all directions as light burned into the sky like a sun that was much too close to the earth. A moment later, it exploded again, a hail of fireballs raining down.

As the attack made contact with the ground, they could all feel the earth beneath their feet shaking. From their high vantage point, everyone watched in horror as buildings were decimated before their very eyes.

"Move!" Ash's yell was startling, but Gary decided to trust him rather than argue. Moving on instincts, he threw himself to the side, seeing Dawn land on the other side of him as debris of stone, wood, snow and leaves flew in all directions. The attack hit far enough away from them so that they weren't hurt but it directly, but everything flying through the air was another story.

Layers and layers of the ruins that trailed up the side of the mountain were completely obliterated, any secrets that they might have been holding lost to time.

Dawn screamed beside him as an entire tree trunk fell beside her. He reached out, grabbing the young girl's arm and dragging her up with him. The young researcher didn't explain anything as he dragged her along with him, hauling her back behind a massive boulder just before the tree trunk that almost hit her earlier rolled over onto where they had been huddled on the ground.

"Oh Mew," Dawn whispered, out of breath and shaking. "Thanks."

"Don't worry about it." Did she really think that he would have let a tree crush her? What had Ash been telling his friends?

Everything calmed, and Oak peaked up from behind the boulder. He saw Ash, Misty and Brock getting up not far from them, all startled but still in once piece.

Arceus (because Gary was willing to accept that an attack like that could only come from something as powerful as a supposed god) flew closer to them, and now Gary could see the pokémon up close. It was strange, to say the least. From what he could see, it had four legs and a long neck, reminded him a bit of a Stantler or a Girafarig. There was a golden wheel around its body, and what he assumed was fur looked more like solid clouds than anything else.

It was easily the strangest thing he had ever seen.

He tensed up, waiting for another barrage that they couldn't possibly hope to avoid, but it never came. The energy that had been building in front of Arceus vanished, and it stared at the ruins.

"Damos?" The hairs stood up on Gary's neck as the voice seemed to reverberate all around them, but at the same time there was absolutely no echo. Neither masculine or feminine, it was easily one of the eerie sounds that he ever heard. Beside him, Dawn gasped and stared in awe.

What kind of pokemon could draw such attention with a single word?

It hovered silently before another question sent shivers up his spine. "Who are you?"

The sound of footsteps broke both Gary and Dawn out of their stupor. The other three joined them, Ash staring up a bit of horror and annoyance on his face. "They didn't believe me. They're going to try and give him the fake jewel." He took off without another word, sprinting up and over the damaged mountain.

"Ash! Wait!" Misty called after him, but he didn't pay her any attention. She actually growled angrily, tearing off after him though she had no hope of actually catching up to him. That boy could climb like a Mankey. He also attracted trouble like it was nobody's business.

Gary didn't know what possessed him to do it. It would have been so easy to turn around and head back down to the Pokemon Center, get his stuff and hightail it out of there. Instead, he chose to run after the two, hearing Dawn and Brock running after him.

"Wait!" Misty yelled again, managing to catch up to Ash when they were on flat ground. She grabbed his arm, jerking him to a rough stop. "Are you crazy? Do you have a plan?"

Ash pulled his arm away from her and glared. "Well what do you expect me to do? Sit here while Sheena gives the pissed off pokemon a fake Jewel of Life to piss it off even more? I just thought maybe she'd talk to him or something until we found it or he found it or something like that!"

"Stop fighting!" Brock snapped at them, his voice echoing around them loudly as all the other sounds suddenly died. Every single one of them looked around with alarm. Tension rose in the air as Arceus moved above them.

"You're saying this is the Jewel of Life?" No one needed to be told that Arceus was enraged, they could all just feel it. Something shattered above them and there was a shriek of surprise. Arceus flew up into the air again, and they were close enough to see him glare furiously. "The Jewel of Life is a part of me, and it can not, will not, break!"

Up close, Arceus' attacks were even more powerful and frightening. A powerful beam much stronger than anything Gary had ever seen in his life slammed into the ruins, ripping it apart.

A stone pillar above them split with a deafening crack, the massive beam falling down at them. Ash's hands flew up, and he grunted, his knees almost buckling under him as the pillar slammed into an invisible barrier that lit up for a brief moment on impact. It took Gary a moment to realize what he was seeing.

"Go!" Ash sounded far more panicked than anything else as he slowly shifted his weight. "I can't hold it up for long, it's too heavy."

No one argued with him, choosing to scramble back and out of the way. Ash himself moved slowly, lowering his arms as he went. Once no one was beneath it, he let go and the pillar slammed into the ground. The teenage rubbed his arms, discomfort clear on his face.

"Pikapi," Pikachu jumped up onto his shoulder, sniffing him with worry.

"I'm okay..." Ash trailed off, brown eyes locked onto the waterfall not far from them. Gary looked

over just in time to see those people (from Team Rocket, he was pretty sure) that always stalked Ash around, fall down the waterfall. Now wasn't the time to worry about those idiots though.

"What do we do?" Brock yelled over the commotion, trying to keep his balance from the tremors assaulting the mountain they were on.

Out of the corner of his eye, Gary saw Ash shifting. He tried to reach out, tried to grab the other boy, but he was able to keep his balance much easier and avoided him, making yet another mad dash up towards where Arceus was. He didn't want to see what anyone else was doing, taking off after his friend yet again.

"What's the plan?" The trainer-turned-researcher yelled over the sounds around them.

"Talk to Arceus and calm him down?" The questioning tone in the raven-haired boy's voice wasn't lost on him at all. Gary heard three groans behind him coming from the others, and Pikachu looked about ready to slap Ash himself. There was no plan at all.

"You shall be brought to justice!" Arceus unleashed yet another barrage down upon the ruins.

With a bright flash of blue and pink light, Dialga and Palkia appeared together, their powers melding into one powerful barrier that stopped the meteors from smashing into any of them, though the two legendary pokemon visibly bulked under the strain. Seeing the so-called Deities of Time and Space struggling made Gary falter a bit, a part of his mind truly unable to comprehend how powerful Arceus truly was.

The smoke faded away, and both pokemon straightened up, glaring viciously at Arceus as they growled and shrieked.

"Are you siding with the humans?" Arceus raged, his voice crackling through the air like thunder. This time he turned his attacks on them, slamming Palkia into the ruins just about where they could now see Sheena and Kevin were. Dialga slammed into the ground not too far from them.

Palkia was up first, flying into the air and slamming his glowing, pink Aura Sphere into Arceus. The golden rings around the cloud-like pokemon changed colour into a deep red that was used to label fighting-types in the pokedex (Gary was pretty sure he understood where the colour references came from now). The Aura Sphere rippled in front of him and vanished.

"What just happened?" Misty voiced the question that they were all wondering, her voice high with fear that she would never admit.

"The Life Plates," Gary told them, his dark green eyes never once wavering from the battle above. Watching the colours change again as Dialga's attack was blocked. "Remember what they said? Arceus can use them to counter any attack." Dialga and Palkia were both thrown back again, the dragon and steel-type groaning in misery as he slammed into the ground not far from them.

"Not even you, some of my first children, will be spared for siding with humans!" Arceus roared, turning his rage on Dialga first.

Ash stopped running, once again throwing his hand out to block the heatwave that rippled through the air. Slipping on the slick mud caused by the melted snow, Brock slammed into Dawn, who slammed into Misty, who slammed into Gary, who slammed into Ash, and they all fell to the ground, the aura created shield staying up long enough to protect them.

"Get off." Ash squirmed his way out of the bottom of the dog pile, running to the edge of the cliff and stopping. Pikachu ran to his side and tugged at his pants.

"Pikapi?"

"Thanks for the help," Dawn grumbled as they all straightened themselves up, but Ash paid them no mind.

"He needs to stop. He has to stop." His voice wavered, fingers curling into fists as his shoulders shook. Palkia and Dialga were both on the ground, panting and visibly injured. A hollow, echoing whine came from Palkia, a sound that just made Arceus snort with disgust, and that was the moment Gary saw Ash snap.

The trainer's head jerked up, staring towards Arceus with a look that Gary could only call contemptuous. He took a step forward and yelled, "Pikachu use Thunder!"

Pikachu didn't question his trainer's sanity. Instead, he jumped forward, cheeks sparking angrily. The electric attack he unleashed was so powerful that Gary could feel the hair on his arms standing on end. Despite that, Gary didn't expect to get any sort of result from that.

Needless to say, they were all gobsmacked when the electricity slammed into Arceus, causing him to cry out in pain and shock.

Gary's mind ran over the story as quickly as it could while the others cried out with surprise. "The Life Plates," he said aloud as the answer clicked in his mind. "Arceus doesn't have the Electric Plate!"

"He doesn't have water either." Misty said suddenly, tossing several of her pokeballs into the air and unleashing her Marill, Politoed, Starmie and Spheal. "Use Water Gun!"

"You too, Piplup!" Dawn cried out and then tossed another pokeball into the air. "Pachirisu, use Discharge!"

Not one to be left out, Gary too joined in the fray. "Blastoise, Electivire! You know what to do!"

Ash's Buizel appeared along side the others, and together they unleashed a torrent of water and electricity that would have devastated any other pokemon.

However, Arceus wasn't just any other pokemon. His anguished cries echoed through the air, but then he flew up higher, an angry golden light surrounding him. "You all will all face my judgment!"

It was funny, in that moment as the pokemon that apparently created the universe unleashed a blinding attack upon them, all he could think about was the fact that it was a really strong Hyper Beam. Or that's what it looked like. He would have laughed at himself if he wasn't about to die.

A high-pitched cry echoed through the air and a portal opened up in front of them, swallowing the attack and vanishing. A moment later, Giratina rose up from below them, crying out at Arceus.

"You as well?" Arceus growled. "Have all my children betrayed me?" The way he sounded honestly hurt over this would have bothered Gary more, had the pokemon not been trying to kill them.

Giratina looked back at them for a moment, nodding his head and then unleashing his blue fire upon Arceus. Like before, the pokemon's colours shifted to the blazing orange that represented fire, the attack vanishing. In response, Arceus unleashed a barrage of ice crystals upon the pokemon.

Giratina and Dialga cried out in pain, Dialga unable to move from the spot that it landed before, far too injured. Palkia managed to block the attack, a glowing pink sphere glinting brightly with every shard of ice that hit it.

Then the strangest thing happened. The three pokemon exchanged these looks that sent shivers up Gary's spine because they were planning something and he knew it. Dialga looked towards them, staring intently and ignoring the way Palkia attacked Arceus, a rippling sphere appearing around it.

"It's not disappearing!" Dawn cried out.

"I think Palkia's distorting the space around Arceus so it can't attack!" Brock exclaimed, and how he came to that conclusion so fast, no one would ever know.

Dialga cooed and they all looked towards the pokemon. Ash shifted slightly, Dialga's bright red eyes staring at him intently.

"What do you want me to do?" Ash finally asked.

The pokemon made no other sound. Instead, his eyes started to glow pale blue and the same colour light surrounded them. Gary yelled with surprise as he started levitating above the ground, and gasped as the light completely consumed Ash and the other boy vanished right before his eyes. He himself was starting to feel strange, and the last thing he heard was a victorious cry from Dialga.

Then, everything went black.

Chapter End Notes

Despite Ash's best efforts, everything turned out the same anyway. It amused me a bit, to see some of you speculating how Ash telling them that the jewel was fake would change things, but in the end it didn't change a thing. We know Ash has Aura, we know he's right, but Sheena and Kevin? They've been protecting that orb for a long time, family members doing the same before them. They were never going to believe him, aura or not. Why would they? He's a teenager they just met.

On a completely separate note, I've been playing the pokemon games for a very long time now and something awesome happened. I caught a shiny. Most people are probably like 'so what' but I've NEVER just stumbled onto one before. Not only that but it was a Shiny Feebas. Anyone who read the first oneshot in Yesterday's Tomorrow might understand why that amuses me so much.

Hopefully I'll be giving you an update around Christmas, but we'll have to wait and see! It might be a two week wait.

Happy Holidays to everyone, no matter what you celebrate! And if you don't celebrate anything, I hope you have an awesome week too!

Written by: Skylight Sparkle

Edited by: CLAVUS

Reversing The Clock

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

At first everything was black. There wasn't a single sound, not even the rapid beating of her heart or her gasping breaths. It was like nothing existed at all, except for her. She could think, therefore she had to exist, but anything beyond that was up for debate.

Sensations were the first thing to come back. The feeling of being lurched forward at an uncomfortably fast pace. She could feel her heart pounding in her chest, she could feel the sting of tears in her eyes that she desperately tried to hide. The area around her began to shimmer and ripple with blue and green lights and stars of every possible hue between the two colours. Stars danced at the edge of her vision and it looked like faint images were rushing by her too quickly for her to even guess what they were. She could see her friends though, and that made her feel relieved. At least she knew she wasn't alone. She was between Brock and Ash, both looking just as confused as she felt. Misty was on Ash's other side, and Gary was just beyond her.

Looking down, Dawn met Piplup's eyes and the pokemon patted her arm reassuringly. She hugged her partner close, looking down at her leg when something soft brushed against it. Pikachu looked around with pure confusion before leaping up into Ash's arms.

When the sound came back, Dawn wished it hadn't. Everything was so loud, like a million voices all whispering together to create a massive roar. There was no way to hide from the sound.

"Are we dead?" The words slipped from her lips before she could stop herself, echoing around them over and over again.

Brock reached out, grabbing her arm to get her attention. When she looked up at him, he shook his head. No, they were definitely alive.

There was a blinding flash of light that quickly gave way to darkness, and Dawn found herself stumbling forward blindly. She couldn't see for the life of her, and the ground didn't feel quite solid under her feet.

"What the hell was that?" Misty groaned, shaking her head and squinting to try and get her eyes used to the darkness again. "And why is it suddenly night?"

"It's not," Gary said observed, his green eyes looking towards the sky. He pointed above them and said, "Look. But Carefully."

Turning her eyes to the sky, Dawn gasped and said, "A solar eclipse! But...there wasn't..." There definitely hadn't been a solar eclipse just before whatever Dialga had done to them. Her eyes were adjusting to the dark, and that was when she noticed the way Ash kept shifting and looking around in every single direction. "What's with you?"

"This place..." he trailed off and continued to look around. "It's like it's not real."

"What?"

"It's not real. It's like we're still back in that weird flashy place." Ash reached out to touch the wall, frowning but not quite touching it.

"What's wrong with it?" Brock tried to touch the stone wall beside him, a similar expression of confusion appearing on his face. "I can't touch it."

Dawn's dark eyes looked towards the ground that they were standing on, frowning when she realized that she wasn't actually standing on the ground itself. Alarmed, she hugged Piplup to her chest and took a few steps towards Misty. "What's going on?"

"Okay," Gary spoke up again, holding a hand up in the air. "This is my first time dealing with the Deities of the world but I get the feeling it's not yours, so I don't know why it's not obvious." His words weren't unkind by any means, he sounded more surprised than anything else. "Dialga sent us back in time, but he probably wanted us to see this so we're...stuck between time and space. We can watch but we can't do anything."

Ash's head snapped up suddenly, looking towards the eclipsed sun. "Arceus was betrayed during an eclipse." Almost as soon as the words escaped his lips, the sky lit up and Arceus himself appeared. He hovered in the sky for a moment, stretching out his legs almost leisurely before gliding towards the buildings below.

Ash bolted, running by them but not the least bit impeded by the snow-covered ground, since his feet technically weren't touching it at all. There was no way he could get in trouble since they couldn't interact with anything (as far as any of them knew), but letting him run off on his own was always a bad thing.

Running down a staircase, Dawn almost crashed into Ash when he came to a sudden stop at a balcony. There was a person walking out of the temple, tall with dark hair and strange, heavy robes made with dark blue and bleached white fabrics. In his hand was a simple staff.

"It is time to return the Jewel of Life." Arceus' voice was so calm and serene, completely contrasting the manic, violent creature that they just barely escaped from in their own time. The creature that was still wreaking havoc on Alamos Town in the future.

The man nodded his head, holding out his staff. The top opened, revealing a gleaming orb that looked almost exactly like the one Sheena had been protecting. None of them needed Ash to confirm that it was the real Jewel of Life, they could all see the warm glow that had been absent in the fake. "Here is the Jewel of Life. I welcome you inside!" The man bowed. "Please, follow me."

Arceus did so without any hesitation at all, clearly quite at ease as he glided after the man.

"What the hell?" Gary muttered, eyebrow's furrowing. "How..." He shook his head.

"What?" Brock prompted him curiously.

"Come on," Ash interrupted in a whisper, just before Gary was about to answer the young man's question. The raven-haired teenager once again taking the lead by running across the stone rooftops of the temples. It was pretty easy to keep up with him though, since he had to keep pausing to guess which way to go.

They reached inside, looking down over a steep balcony. Below them, the man placed the Jewel of Life into the same contraption Sheena had it in. Not just any jewel though, the fake one. Arceus glided into the empty room calmly.

"Why do I get the feeling that something really bad is about to happen?" Dawn asked.

"Pip piplup?" Piplup muttered to her, nuzzling his soft, feathered head into her chin.

"Why don't we ask all of those pokemon?" Misty quipped, nodding above them. Dawn leaned forward as close as she could to the railing, gasping when she saw the sheer amount of pokemon that were gathering not only above them, but around them in every possible spot.

"Those things on them," Ash muttered quietly, though nothing else beyond them could hear him. "They look a lot like what those armies that fought at The Tree of Beginning used to control the pokemon." He frowned.

"The ones we saw in the time flower," Brock said, his voice rising with a bit of excitement. "You're right. These pokemon must be under someone's control."

"Pikapi?" Pikachu spoke up suddenly from his silent perch on Ash's shoulder. "Pika cha pika." He pointed down below them.

"Yeah, I think he's the one controlling them too," Ash grumbled quietly, turning his attention back to the man below. "But..."

Whatever might have been on the boy's mind was instantly lost. The man threw his arm up into the air and yelled, "There, now take it!"

Almost immediately bright blue electricity was unleashed upon Arceus from all directions. Dawn screamed in horror, clapping her hands over her mouth before she realized that no one could hear them. They were less than ghosts in this time and place.

Arceus' pained cries echoed through the air, but the pokemon managed to choke out, "What are you doing?" The pain, confusion and betrayal was so powerful that it made every single one of them twitch. Pikachu let out a spine-tingling whine as he hid his face in Ash's hair.

Ash reached up, pulling his long-time friend into his arms with shaking hands.

"This is what happened that night. Remember what Sheena said? Damos never returned the Jewel of Life. He attacked Arceus instead." Gary gritted his teeth and nodded his head towards the man. "That must be him."

A loud creaking sound was barely heard over the crackle of electricity and Arceus' anguish, but it was still enough to draw their attention. A long draw-bridge made of thick wood and rope was lowered behind the alter that Damos watched Arceus from. The tall man turned, walking down the stone stairs and across the wooden bridge, looking up at something above them.

Dawn leaned forward, frowning when she saw another man watching from a balcony high above. Like Damos, he looked almost regal in thick red and black clothing. She watched as Damos made a gesture up to him with his hand, the man repeating the same movement. She wasn't paying attention to anything else, watching them until an earth shattering crash echoed around them.

She jumped and screamed, backing into Brock and squeezing Piplup tight enough to make his arms flail. A massive beam of wood collapsed onto Arceus, followed by pieces of the stone roof. Dust filled the air, making it almost impossible to see, but the faint glow of Arceus' golden aura, along with the glow of his red eyes, made him visible.

The pokemon forced his way out of the rubble, shakily trying to get towards the fake Jewel that was left there. His eyes fell onto it almost hopefully, but his hopes were dashed quickly. "No..."

"It's not, it's counterfeit." Damos' voice echoed through the chamber from above them. He stood up in the balcony beside the man in red. He stretched his arm out, and the end of his staff opened to reveal the real orb. "I could never give you the real Jewel of Life." It closed again, and he brought

it back to his chest, motioning up towards the pokemon surrounding them.

Another torrent of electricity reigned down upon Arceus, who was helpless to that element without the Electric Plate. "You fool!" His voice echoed through the air, but it was impossible to know whether he was talking to Damos, or to himself. He didn't yell when the electricity hit him this time, thin legs wobbling as he fell to the ground. The temple itself started to shake, rocks and stones from above them crashing down upon the pokemon.

"Michina will flourish for forever more! And never again will it turn into a wasteland!" Damos slammed his staff into the ground and the man beside him nodded.

The debris from above them trapped Arceus, concealing him entirely as electricity rippled through the entire area. The violence was horrifying, but there was something worse about the silence that followed.

That silence was quickly stripped away as the rubble exploded in all directions, shattering columns and crushing some of the attacking pokemon.

Arceus slowly pushed himself into a standing position, his aura flaring dangerously around him. "You betrayed me, and now you try to destroy me?" The pure rage that was in his voice sent shivers up all of their spines, and even Piplup's feathers stood on end. Arceus held up his head and a blinding sphere of light appeared, breaking off into meteors that slammed into the building around them.

The pokemon all scattered, but many were too late to run as the temple fell apart around them. The balcony that Damos was standing on shattered, and they could only watch in horror as the two men fell into the depths below, the staff from his hand slamming into a rock and rolling down into a waterway that was barely visible.

The stone they were standing of broke, and all of them reacted quickly, moving closer together. Dawn gripped Brock's arm, holding Piplup close as she moved between him and Gary. Ash moved close, keeping Pikachu in one arm and grabbing Misty's hand with the other to pull her towards them.

The strange thing about the whole situation was that they weren't falling. They were just hovering over nothing.

"We're not really here," Brock finally said, shifting uncomfortably. "We can't fall because we don't exist in this space."

"I don't understand," Misty's voice was shaking, and she took a full step closer to Ash, who let go of her hand and put it on her shoulder instead. "Why?"

"Dialga and the others wanted us to see this," Ash spoke up, his voice dull but at the same time, almost heartbroken. "We needed to know."

Gary nodded in agreement of Ash's assessment, but Dawn just wanted to ask why they needed to see this. She felt sick to her stomach, unshed tears welling up in her eyes as she watched Arceus fall to the ground, being entombed in the stone below.

Without warning, everything once again went dark.

...

Sometimes it felt like time was slipping by way too fast. Brock could remember when all of his

siblings were born. He remembered their first words, their steps, and all the other big milestones. They were all growing up, and sometimes he felt like he was too far away from them, missing all the other important moment in their lives. He missed several of his siblings getting their first pokémon already, though they all talked to him on those days. It just wasn't the same and sometimes he wished that he could turn back time. His life hadn't necessarily been less complicated four years ago, and he had no regrets, he sometimes just wished that he could experience everything.

He knew that it was possible to travel through time. Meeting Sammy, the young boy that Celebi brought from the past, told him as much, but he never expected to travel through time himself. Even if he entertained the notion from time to time, he would have never expected to be tossed thousands of years into the past.

Their vision and sound had come back fairly quickly after they blacked out, and Brock was once again assaulted by the strange array of lights that streaked by them. The group of five stayed closer together this time, including Gary, who hovered between Dawn and Ash. For what it was worth, no one seemed quite as shocked for the strange place they were in now, but rather what they saw before.

Dawn was terrified, hiding her face in Piplup's soft feathers, and honestly, Brock couldn't blame the young girl in the least. What they had witnessed was terrifying. Gary looked shaken but contemplative, his green eyes focusing on nothing in particular, but shifting to look at everyone else every once and a while. He did manage to give Ash an odd look though. Brock couldn't blame him for his confusion anymore than he could blame Dawn for her fear. Ash and Misty had been at odds with each other all day, but they were practically clinging to one another. Misty was scared, though she valiantly tried to hide it. It was nothing compared to Ash, who looked closed to tears of frustration and sadness.

"You know, I don't think that actually happened," Gary spoke up suddenly, his voice echoing around them oddly.

"What?"

"Arceus looked like he was dying there, and he definitely didn't die in our timeline." Gary shrugged. "The only thing we know is that Damos betrayed him and attacked. Arceus was injured and retreated. Maybe Dialga, Palkia, or both showed us that so we wouldn't let it happen, because it's not supposed to happen in our timeline."

"Our timeline?" Misty repeated, looking at him curiously.

"Yeah. I mean, haven't you ever watched or read anything with time travel? If we end up somewhere that we can interact with, we need to be careful or we might cause a paradox. Hell, in some ways us going back is a paradox all together."

"A paradox?" Ash asked, the sadness in his eyes being completely eclipsed by confusion.

"Right, sorry, IQ of 25." Gary was only teasing, but Ash still glared at him fiercely. "You ever heard of the Butterfree Effect? It's where a Butterfree in Kanto flapping its wings could cause a hurricane in...I don't know...Kalos for instance. One small thing changes everything else. If we mess up time to the point where, say, Arceus got the Jewel of Life back in the past, there would be no reason for us to go back because he wouldn't show up to destroy Michina. Hell, we might not even exist. But then there'd be no one to go back and make that change so there couldn't be a change so things would happen the way they did so we'd be there to go back into the past."

"What?" Dawn stared at him, completely bewildered.

"We can't change the past," Brock simplified for her.

"Then why is Dialga sending us there, if that's where we're going?" The blue-haired girl looked up at him curiously.

"Because we already did." Before anyone else could question Gary's words, everything around them jerked to a stop. It was much more violent than when they stopped before, slamming into the ice-covered ground.

Unlike before, when they were watching Damos lead the attack on Arceus, none of them had really realized that they couldn't feel the hot or the cold while they were there. Now though, the chill of the air bit at the spots of bare skin on their faces and hands.

"It's day time," Brock muttered, pushing himself to his feet and looking around. They were in the exact same spot that they showed up in before, the temple still completely in-tact in the distance. "And I think we're really here this time."

"It feels like we're here," Ash commented, closing his eyes and taking a deep breath. "The Jewel of Life is definitely still here somewhere."

"Is it just me or is it not as cold as it is back home?" Dawn asked them. "Does that mean it's a different time of year?"

"Could just be the environment. Weather systems have been really weird for a couple decades now, but over the past few years it's gotten pretty noticeable and unpredictable. Hoenn gets hotter, Sinnoh gets colder, storms are worse." Gary shrugged. "Wouldn't surprise me if it had to do with the legendary pokemon, all things considered. Actually—."

"There's something coming." Ash interrupted Gary, his eyes locked on the hill beside them. He took a couple steps back, everyone else following his lead as a primarily red pokemon with bits of steel all over its body marched towards them.

"Is that a Heatran?" Brock squinted, not surprised to see it really, just curious. Especially about what looked like a saddle on its back. Who rode a legendary pokemon like that? He looked over at Ash. "Another legendary." The boy just sighed and shook his head.

Without any sort of warning, Heatran open its mouth and unleashed a powerful fireball. The group scattered, Brock and Dawn landed on one side of the pokemon while Ash, Misty and Gary landed on the other.

Men swarmed down the hill, wearing thick, plain clothing and what probably served as armour for them. It didn't look like anything that Brock had ever seen in his life. Not that it really mattered, since he was much too worried about the sharp, spear-like weapons that were being pointed at them.

He got up, tugging Dawn with him and moving so that he was in front of her as the soldiers surrounded them. Ash, Misty and Gary had formed a triangle of sorts, keeping their shoulders together so that no one's back was exposed. Heatran inched closer to them, but Pikachu and Piplup jumped into the fray, glaring at the pokemon and practically daring it to move towards their trainers.

"Woah, wait!" Ash cried out to the two pokemon, taking a few steps forward and abandoning the safety of his group. He kept his hands in the air and took a few steps forward, eyes locked onto the legendary pokemon. "Hey, it's okay, we don't mean any harm."

"Ash!" Misty hissed at him angrily, but he just waved her off. The teenage girl folded her arms across her chest, glaring at the raven-haired boy that so easily dismissed her worry.

Ash took a few steps towards Heatran, but oddly enough, the pokemon didn't seem ready to attack anymore. In fact, it looked confused and curious beyond anything else. Ash slowly set his hand on the pokemon's head and smiled. "There you go. See, we're fine."

"Ran," Heatran muttered, and there was a whisper starting to rise from the soldiers around them.

"What is this?" Brock looked up at the sound of a commanding, cold voice. Standing at the top of the stone staircase was a man in red and black clothing, a strange golden headpiece adorning his bright red hair. Hovering beside him was a rather dirty Bronzong, another strange thing wrapped around him as well.

"Master Marcus! These people just appeared here," one of the men said, jerking his spear in their direction. "And this one here dares to manipulate Heatran!"

Marcus looked towards Ash, making his way down the stone stairs, and Dawn peered around Brock's arm, her eyes going wide and gasping with shock. "That's the man that was with Damos." She didn't need to explain anything beyond that.

"Bronzong," the red-haired man waved his hand at the pokemon carelessly. "Use hypnosis."

Bronzong glided ahead, moving into a position where all five of them could see him. His eyes started to glow, a soothing chant echoing from the primarily steel pokemon.

"No!" Ash's hand shot up, and the effects from Bronzong's attack vanished. Brock shook his head and focused, realizing that he could faintly see the ripple from where Ash's Aura was blocking the psychic attack.

"Another one!" Someone burst out with alarm.

Marcus came to a stop, staring directly at Ash with a look that Brock didn't like at all. He tilted his head up and said, "Heatran. Attack."

The calm state that the pokemon had been in immediately shattered. It launched a fireball towards Misty and Gary, but Ash moved quickly, throwing himself in front of them to block the attack with his Aura. The fireball exploded on the invisible barrier, creating a much more impressive display than the psychic attack. At the same time, Pikachu and Piplup attacked, unleashing a torrent of electricity-filled water onto the legendary pokemon.

"He is another one," Marcus said before snapping his fingers. "Take them all. Get the confinements." Immediately, they were swarmed.

Brock couldn't see what was happening anymore, all he knew was that there were people practically pouncing on him, shoving him to his knees on the chilled, stone ground. Dawn landed beside him, and the Bronzong hovered in front of them again.

He could hear Ash, Gary and Misty yelling, but none of their words made sense. Nothing did, except for Bronzong's glowing eyes that reminded him how good sleep was.

Finding himself agreeing with the pokemon, Brock closed his eyes and fell asleep.

...

"Son of a—!"

"Misty!"

Gary jerked out of his sleep, slowly blinking his viridian eyes with confusion. He shivered, the cold seeping through his grey jacket. He wanted to rub his hands together, but they were firmly tied together behind his back. Looking around with confusion, he could see the blue-haired girl that insisted he was a poet sitting not far from him, not even trying to hide how frightened she was as she struggled with her own bindings.

She glanced around, letting out a sigh of relief. "You're okay. We were worried. Misty said you took a pretty hard hit to the head."

Confused for only a moment, the memories quickly rushed back to him and Gary jerked up straighter. He could feel a bit of pain where the blunt end of someone's spear had bashed down on him, but it wasn't enough to actually bother him. The brunet could remember everything so clearly. He could practically see the men swarming them, lashing out as they tried to fight back. He remembered quite a few of them ganging up on Ash, and whatever they had done, it made his old friend actually panic. That was what distracted him enough for another man to knock him out.

He looked around, seeing a wary Brock and a positively seething Misty, but there was definitely no raven-haired boy there with them. "Where's Ash?"

"We don't know," Misty growled, like an enraged mother Arcanine.

"You got hit but the rest of us were hypnotized," Brock explained. "Whatever they did, they took him somewhere else. I mean, I read about how psychics were treated in the past, but I never even thought his Aura could get him in trouble here."

"That's why he hides it," Misty pointed out as she tried to work on the bindings that were in front of her.

"Why aren't your hands behind your back?" Gary asked. The hit on the head must have been messing with him a bit. He felt like he couldn't really focus, choosing to zone in on the most random things.

"They were," she replied bluntly, sea-green eyes focused on the ropes. "I'm flexible."

"Piplup and Pikachu are gone too," Dawn added, biting her lip with obvious worry. "I can't even reach my other pokeballs."

"I'll get out soon," the Cerulean Gym Leader assured the Coordinator. "Then we'll get everyone else out and deal with this weird place."

Weird place. Those words made something ring in Gary's mind, something that he noticed before but didn't get the chance to talk about. It took him a moment, but then it came back to him. "We can understand them."

"No, I'm pretty sure I don't," Dawn quipped sarcastically. "Throwing kids in a jail cell for just showing up?"

"Not like that." Gary shook his head as he turned his attention back to Misty, watching her work on the ropes. "I mean we can literally understand them. This is thousands of years in the past. They don't speak the same language we do."

"But we understand them perfectly," Brock finished, realizing what the other boy was getting at. "I never even thought...you're right, that is weird."

"What does it matter?" Misty asked, her brow furrowed with concentration and not even bothering to look at him.

"I'm not sure it does, but look out there." He nodded out the thick, steel doors of their cavern-like jail cell. "The words are definitely written in those old runes. Their language is different." Gary shrugged. "Maybe Palkia messed with time a bit for us too."

"Maybe," Brock agreed. "But why?"

The sound of footsteps echoed through the halls, and Misty quickly jumped up, moving farther away from the bars and into the shadows to avoid people seeing that she wasn't bound the right way. Dawn moved by her side, positioning herself so that her small body blocked Misty's hands entirely.

An old man looked in on them curiously. "Oh good, you're awake. You must be very confused." He sounded oddly kind of a guard, but it did occur to Gary that he was probably just doing his job. "This is one of the underground prisons, and one of Master Marcus' magical monsters used hypnosis on you."

"Magical monsters?" Dawn repeated.

"A pokemon?" The man didn't seem to know that word, but nodded at Brock anyway.

"Where's Ash?" Misty demanded, and there was little doubt in anyone's mind that she probably wanted to be at the bars of the cell, yelling in the man's face. "Pikachu and Piplup too."

"The other young man with you? He is with Master Marcus right now. Don't worry, he'll be fine. They're sure to bring your husband back soon."

"My what?" Misty looked utterly horrified, her cheeks turning bright red.

"Oh, I apologize, is he not? Is it one of these young men?"

"No! I don't have one!"

"Really?" The man looked entirely too confused at that. "You wear your hair up and are of marrying age, unlike the young lady beside you who is a bit too young. You should not be traveling with young men."

"No, no, he is her husband," Gary spoke up quickly, and he could feel her glare directed at him. "Just not used to it yet, you know? I'm the redhead's brother and..." His eyes turned to Dawn. "That's his little sister. I know, they don't look anything alike. Just the attitudes. And he's our teacher." He nodded at Brock.

"Oh, that makes sense." That seemed to appease the man. "Don't worry, they'll bring him back soon." He kept walking, no doubt checking on the other prisoners.

There was silence and then—

"What the hell, Gary?" In her anger, Misty finally managed to break the ropes around her wrist. She was positively fuming. "What was that?"

"A cover story, Magmar," he shot back at her, ignoring her growl. "I've read about past civilizations and it wasn't even that long ago that people around our age were expected to get married. Women wearing their hair up must be an indicator of that here. It'll make people question us a little less if at least one thing about us is normal for them. Women traveling with men probably just don't happen here unless they're related." He eyed her for a moment. "I can't really tell or not right now, but when I saw her, Leaf practically rubbed it in my face that Ash had a girlfriend and that it was you. So I don't see the big deal."

Misty worked on getting the ropes off of Dawn's wrists. She ignored Gary, looking at the blue-eyed girl instead. "Boys are stupid."

"I know," the younger of the two agreed. "Ash's sister? We look nothing alike!"

"Be nice guys," Brock warned them. "Gary's right. We showed up out of nowhere, we look strange and we have strange things with us. We have no idea what's going on, so do we want them to know we're from the future?" That made both of the girls fall silent.

A loud clank at the end of the hallway drew all of their attention. Gary leaned against the bars, trying to peer out as best as he could. His viridian eyes went wide and he said, "Ash." He scrambled back away from the door, Misty and Dawn hiding their hands behind their backs to make it look like they were still constrained.

Two hulking men were holding onto Ash's arms, but the teenager didn't seem to be focused too much on them, allowing them to practically drag him along. His hands were free, and it almost looked like he was clawing at something on his wrist.

No one said a word as the door to the cell was opened and Ash was shoved in with the rest of them. He stumbled, falling to the ground and not even managing to catch himself. He stayed like a heap on the floor as the guards locked the door and walked away.

"Ash!" Misty practically launched herself from her spot, kneeling beside him instead as he pushed himself to his knees. "Are you okay? What did they do?" Her eyes were scanning him, searching for any visibly injury, though there didn't seem to be any.

Having been listening to their snide remarks to one another for the past few hours, Gary fully expected some sort of sass from Ash, but he didn't even look up at any of them. His brown eyes were focused on his wrists, and only then did any of them realize that there were these strange golden cuffs on both of them. Cuffs that he was desperately trying to get off.

"What's that?" Dawn asked curiously as she helped untie Brock before moving onto Gary.

"You're bruising yourself." Misty voice's came out calm but worried as she grabbed his hand to try and stop him. That actually got a reaction.

Ash jerked his hand away from her, looking up with a panicked expression. "I don't care, I need to get them off. I need to get them off now."

Gary inched closer, trying to inspect them, but they didn't look special to him. "What's wrong?"

"I can't..." Ash shook his head, taking a deep breath and visibly trying to calm himself down. "I can't feel anything. At all."

"What?"

"Those aren't normal cuffs," a deep voice spoke up from the cell across from them, startling all of

them. Ash himself physically winced. Looking around, a man emerged from the shadows, adorned in blue and white robes.

Gary inhaled sharply, recognizing him easily as Damos, the man that betrayed Arceus.

"Those," he nodded his head to Ash's wrists, raising up his own so that they could see an identical pair on his own, "were another foolish mistake of mine that Marcus abused. I wished to have control of my abilities when I was younger and created these. They were a mistake. You see, the energy that naturally flows in this mineral completely blocks a person's Aura."

Those words made them all completely forget about Damos, looking over at the brown-eyed boy instead. It was Misty who whispered, "You can't feel anything..."

Ash looked up at her and slowly shook his head, glancing from one person to the next. "I can't feel any sort of Aura or energy at all."

Chapter End Notes

Here's my present to everyone here!

First and foremost, I owe a HUGE thanks to my beta, CLAVUS. I sent her this chapter on the 23rd and asked if it was possible to get it edited by today (I promise, this is an exception, I'll keep sending things a week or so ahead from now on). Of course it would have been okay if she didn't, but being the beautiful person that she is, she sent this to me this morning. Keep being awesome!

A couple things: the whole being young and married thing, as well as women wearing their hair up being a symbol of being married are historically accurate for different cultures and societies. This one here in Michina isn't based on any real life one in particular. Just bits and pieces of others. That part was honestly just for the giggles, don't read too much into it.

To everyone who kept saying 'well Ash's Aura is going to change things' or 'it must be important', how do you like my twist? Don't worry, I'll be explaining more in the next chapter!

I hope everyone who celebrates it is having a Merry Christmas! If you celebrate another holiday, Happy Holidays! If you don't celebrate anything at all, still have an awesome day!

Written by: Skylight Sparkle

Edited by: CLAVUS

When We're Lost

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Some people liked to exaggerate Misty's temper, comparing her to different fiery and explosive pokémon and objects. She liked to think that she was growing out of the anger that almost always used to plague her. At that moment though, there was no way she could object to any of those claims. All week, she had been annoyed and angry, specifically with her boyfriend more than anything else, but now she was positively enraged and he was once again the reason for it. The difference was, this time, she was angry for him, not at him.

Ash was still trying to pry off the simple cuffs that had been clasped around his wrists. His gloves were gone, no doubt torn away so that they could actually put the horrible manacles on him. His fingers were pale from the cold, and he was only making the bruising where he was yanking at them worse, trying to get them off.

"Ash, stop." She grabbed his hands once again to get him to stop. She didn't want him to pull away from her like he had moments before, but it was better than letting him hurt himself. He looked up at her, and Misty inhaled sharply at the sheer terror that he couldn't possibly hope to hide. "Hey, it's okay. We'll get them off."

"Yeah. Pikachu's Iron Tail would make quick work of that," Gary pointed out, nodding his head at the cuffs.

"Are you crazy? Pikachu could hit his arms!" Dawn exclaimed, motioning wildly with her hands. "He could cut them off instead!"

Gary slowly nodded his head, conceding the point. It didn't matter anyway, since Pikachu wasn't there.

"At least they'd be off," Ash grumbled, fidgeting uncomfortably.

"You don't mean that," the redhead scolded him, lips arcing into a frown.

"It would be a kindness in a way," Damos' voice reached them from the other cell, once again drawing the attention back to himself. "For someone who has dormant Aura, discovering that you have it, unleashing that power, is like being blind and then truly seeing for the first time. Losing it so abruptly, so unnaturally, is like having all of your physical senses torn away from you."

Misty looked around at Ash, frowning at the way his shoulders slumped. He wasn't disputing the claim, and even trying to imagine what he was possibly feeling made her sick and uncomfortable.

"Why should we trust you?" Dawn snapped. She jumped from where she had been kneeling on the floor, blue eyes flashing angrily.

"We are all in a similar situation at the moment, trapped here by that backstabber, Marcus." His calm voice became so angry that it made the young girl take a few steps back, even though there were two sets of metal bars and a hallway separating them from the man that they knew would betray Arceus. "He was my second in command, until he tricked me and threw me in this jail."

"Well you probably deserved it," she growled back. "We know who you are and what you did, Damos."

"Dawn," Brock hissed at her, his hand falling on her shoulder. "Stop."

"You know me," Damos muttered. "Interesting, since it's obvious that you're not from here. How is this possible?"

"Don't act like you don't know." Ash's voice came out shaky, his hands still fidgeting, though his bright brown eyes were locked on the man, upset, angry and betrayed. "Why would you refuse to give Arceus back the Jewel of Life? Why set a trap for him?"

"Ash, we're not supposed to be telling him things like that," Gary hissed, trying to remind the other boy that they weren't supposed to meddle with time.

Damos jumped up from where he was sitting, storming over to the edge of his cell and grabbing the bars of it, his vibrant blue eyes glaring at them fiercely. "How dare you! I would do nothing of the sort! I fully intend on returning the Jewel of Life to Arceus!"

"Liar, we all know what you're really going to do." Ash being vocal was apparently enough to prompt Dawn to continue her verbal onslaught.

"It's the truth!" Damos looked to the floor. "It's why Marcus put me in here. To stop me. It is my job to help and defend Arceus, and I would never betray him!"

"Your job?" Misty repeated those two words, feeling Ash tense up beside her. "What's that supposed to mean? That you're some kind of..." She trailed off, not quite sure if she wanted to know the answer. "Some kind of Chosen One to help Arceus, or something?"

Damos was silent, staring at her with confusion and curiosity. "Yes," he finally answered. "I know it seems farfetched, but I am Arceus' Chosen One, meant to protect the legendary pokemon and keep balance when they cannot."

Ash inhaled sharply, his fingers curling around hers, gripping her hand tightly. Dawn and Brock stopped moving as well, looking equally as shocked.

"Chosen One?" Gary muttered, eyeing them all suspiciously. He was the odd-man out, the one who had no way to know why they were all so shocked at this revelation.

"That's why you can use Aura," Brock slowly pieced together. "And we saw what Ash did when they tried to hypnotize him. So Marcus must have used those cuffs to block his Aura so that the hypnosis would work!"

"That actually does make sense," Gary agreed, nodding his head.

"What are you talking about?" Damos stared at them all blankly, clearly lost.

"I saw it," Ash spoke quickly, drawing the attention back to him. "In a dream. I saw what was going to happen." It wasn't necessarily a lie since they had all seen what was going to happen, and it might as well have been in a dream. "That's why we came here."

The sound of footsteps coming from the hall forced all of the conversation to drop. The guards that brought Ash in earlier appeared once again, eyeing the ripped ropes on the rocky floor. "You two are coming with us." He nodded at Misty and Dawn.

"What?" Immediately, all five of them were on their feet, glaring harshly at the two men.

"Master Marcus said to bring the two young women to talk, by any means necessary. Come

quietly, and no one will get hurt." It was a petty threat, but enough to make Dawn tug at Misty's sleeve.

"Lets just go," the younger girl whispered. "Maybe we can figure out what's going on. Escape even."

The redhead hadn't thought of that. She slowly nodded her head, knowing that this might be their only chance to piece together exactly what was going on. She looked over at Ash sternly. "Don't be stupid until we get back." Then she dropped her voice and whispered, "Give us half an hour then bust out if you can."

He didn't even scowl at her implying that he could be stupid, he just stared blankly, his eyes following her movements as she and Dawn walked towards the front of the cell. The boys backed up farther away, and could only watch as the girls were let out, the door slamming shut and locking behind them.

Almost immediately, Ash shot forward, stumbling a bit on his own two feet before grasping the bars that were keeping him locked away. Misty frowned a bit, knowing that while he could be a klutz at times when he wasn't paying attention, but Ash was actually pretty coordinated. More so than when he was younger. She would have bet anything that it was the loss of his Aura bothering him.

"Be careful," Ash muttered quietly.

"We'll bring your wife and sister back soon," the younger of the two men said, sympathy written across his face.

Ash blinked, staring blankly at him before his face scrunched up with confusion and what Misty could only describe as disgust. Luckily, he didn't say anything to throw the story off, the guards could have interpreted it as his unease with them being taken away, but Misty knew better. She scowled back at him, turning away so he wouldn't see the bit of hurt in her eyes, though he might not have been able to anyway. It never really occurred to the green-eyed girl that the way he seemed to actually figure out her moods might have been because of the very sense that was torn away from him. That hurt a bit too, even if that wasn't his fault.

She kept her eyes on the ground as they were led away, ignoring Dawn's worried expression. A moment later, she looked up, deciding to try and memorize the pathway back to the prison cells as best as she could. It wasn't really a complicated layout, going around a few corners and up many different flights of stairs.

Misty was an athletic girl, quite proud of her swimming times and how she preformed in the self-defense classes that she decided to take back in Cerulean. Despite that, her leg muscles burned by the time they got to the top of the stairs. Dawn was trailing behind her a little bit, looking about ready to just fall to her knees.

Contrasting sharply with the stone bricks that they'd seen in the halls, the room that they were led into had woven tapestries, sculptures, gold, silver, jewels and so many other different kinds of metal work everywhere around it that it was almost impossible to take in everything.

Marcus sat at the head of a long table, steaming plates of food stretched out across the entire thing. He motioned to the two seats on the left hand side of the table. "Ladies, come sit. You must be tired."

Dawn took a step closer to Misty, her hand twitching a bit, like she wanted to reach out and grab

the older girl's hand but didn't know if she was okay with that. Misty kept her stern, brave face on, but she was nervous too. Reaching out, she squeezed Dawn's hand and led the way to the table, sitting in the seat closer to Marcus so that the younger girl wouldn't have to.

"Eat."

"What do you want?" Misty asked him bluntly, not bothering to touch the food even though she was hungry. She had no idea what it was, or if they'd done anything to it.

Marcus clicked his tongue with disapproval. "Women do as they're told and do not ask questions. You must have been poorly raised."

Dawn bristled beside her, and Misty's lips pressed together into a thin line. "I was raised better than you."

He narrowed his blood red eyes at them. "You are going to tell me who you are, why you're here, how you got here, and you're going to tell me about the magic user."

Realizing that the magic user must have been Ash, and remembering Damos' claims about the man, she decided to proceed with extreme caution. They had to give him something, but they certainly couldn't tell him that they were from the future. Misty wished that she was better at chess, because it definitely felt like they were playing a metaphorical version of it.

...

Gary tossed Umbreon's pokeball from his right hand to his left and back again. Impressively, their watches and all of the technology they had on them still seemed to work (outside of any sort of thing that needed coverage), so they were using his to time a half an hour exactly. None of the guards knew that they had pokemon on them, so they could easily break out if they needed to.

If the girls weren't ready though, that could get them into a ton of trouble that could be avoided if only they were patient. He wasn't the problem, Gary knew how to wait, but the boy sitting beside him was more than just a little restless.

Ash shifted again, and Gary was about to tell him to stop, when the other boy jerked with alarm as one of his pokeballs shook and opened. They both panicked, Ash reaching out to grab Ria as she appeared, putting his hand over her mouth so she wouldn't make a sound, while Gary looked around to see if any of the guards had noticed. Luckily only Brock and Damos saw what happened, though the latter seemed a lot more shocked than the former.

"A magical monster. How did you do that?"

Ash opened his mouth to answer but was quickly distracted as Ria started sniffing him and poking at him with alarm. "Ria, stop." She stared at him and his eyes dropped to the floor. "I can't hear you anymore." He held up his wrists to show her.

"Hear her?" Gary asked, looking around at Brock curiously.

"Ria and Ash can communicate using Aura, but if he can't use it..." The young man trailed off and shrugged.

"Ri?" Ria looked down at the cuff on her trainer's wrist, reaching out and touching it curiously. Almost immediately she ripped her hand back, her fur stood on end and she started to growl.

"It's okay," Ash comforted his pokemon, reaching out and picking her up. "I'm..." No doubt about

to say that he was okay, even if for the pokemon's sake, her glare stopped him mid-sentence.

"Is it really that bad?" Gary wondered. He didn't understand how it could be. Ash could still see, hear, talk and everything else.

Ash held a hand out in front of him, frowning as he stared at the light bouncing off of the metal. "I always had Aura, even if I didn't know it, or it was dormant, whatever. Then I could use it and it was like I could really see the world for the first time ever. It was weird but I got used to it." He frowned, shoulders slumping. "Damos is right. Having it gone is like getting all of my other senses taken away at the exact same time." Ash laughed almost bitterly as he shook his head. "You know, I didn't want my Aura at first? I just wanted it to go away and it was so hard to deal with because I could literally see the world with my eyes closed. Like everything had a glow to it. Now it's all just..." He seemed to struggle with the word he was looking for. "Empty."

Ria was staring at Ash as she spoke and shook her head almost sadly. She pointed at herself and nodded her head determinedly. Ash laughed a bit and scratched behind her ear. "Yeah, you got this."

"I thought you couldn't understand her?" Gary asked, trying to prompt Ash to see what he saw almost immediately.

Ash blinked up at him before his eyes widened a bit and a small smile appeared on his face. "I can't like that but..."

"I don't know how it works, you'll have to show me more later, but the power, it's not who you are. Never was. You aren't an Aura user that happens to be named Ash. You're Ash Ketchum who happens to be able to use Aura."

"He's right, you know," Damos spoke up from the other cell, drawing their attention to him. "I was much like you when I was your age."

"I believe that," Ash replied with a small shrug.

"Damos," Brock spoke up. "You said you created those, but there must be a way to get them off that doesn't involve cutting off a limb."

"There is," Damos nodded his head. "This metal is rare, embedded with powerful magic. When I was young, a little older than you perhaps and just about to be married, my Aura, my destiny, was revealed to me. I acted immaturely, like I was better than everyone." He sighed and looked down. "Until my power lashed out and I hurt my wife very badly. She survived, but I knew I needed to control it." The man looked up at them, his blue eyes moving from one face to the next. "I heard of the ones who had control over such gifts, the Aura Guardians, but there were none to be found no matter how much I searched. Instead, I found a man. His Aura was dark and cruel, one of the last disciples of the fallen one, but he had the materials that could stop it. He gave them to me without a cost. I was young and foolish, not questioning him and taking them, forging two sets in case one broke. I used it on myself but it was horrible. I had them removed and vowed to never use them, but I kept them, just in case." He looked so sad, so apologetic that none of them questioned his sincerity. "I wish I had destroyed them."

"How did you get them off?" Brock asked again. Gary himself was more interested in the story, but knew that the older boy was right in keep with the relevant topic.

"Psychic power can temporarily disrupt the flow of negative energy in the cuffs. Then you can use your Aura for a very brief moment to push them off." Damos looked directly at Ash while saying

this. "It has to be very, very powerful though, both the psychic power and your own. You will have but a split second to do it."

"We don't have any psychic pokemon on us unless..." Ash glanced over at Gary almost hopefully.

"Sorry." Gary shook his head. "Don't have any of mine on me." The other boy sighed. He looked down as Ash's tiny Riolu suddenly perked up a bit, looking down at her own hands. When she didn't do anything else, he added, "Hey, don't worry, we'll find something." As soon as he was done talking, his watch started beeping, signaling that a half an hour was up.

"Hey Ria," the raven-haired boy spoke calmly. His little pokemon perked up, staring with eager eyes. "Break the bars. We're going to find Misty, Dawn, Pikachu and Piplup."

...

It was only after Marcus ate from the food at the table himself that Misty humored him at all by eating a couple grapes. She wasn't about to stuff herself though, not with so many things she couldn't really identify. Dawn was following her lead, picking from the same things since they both knew those weren't laced with anything.

Marcus hadn't asked them anything else, but is blood red eyes were observing them so closely that it made Misty uncomfortable. She had half a mind to call out one of her pokemon, but decided to keep calm.

"Why did you come here?" He finally broke the silence. "How?" The red-haired man had asked them that before, but neither was inclined to answer.

Dawn shifted uncomfortable beside her, and Misty took a deep breath, hoping against all hope that the young girl would play along. "We're from another place. We...my...husband," she tried not to stumble over the word that was so foreign to her in this respect, "he has those powers that can protect us but sometimes it shows him things. He saw us coming here so we did. We used a magical creature to appear here."

Marcus leaned back in his chair, eyes unwavering. "A visionary? What did he see that made you come?"

"Arceus," Dawn spoke up suddenly. Misty had to actively remind herself not to turn around and glare at the young girl. All she could do was hope that she didn't give too much away. "He saw Arceus appearing here. He...my brother...we came to see. We brought her brother and their close friend and teacher too."

"Did he now? What did he see?" The man leaned forward.

"Damos," Dawn answered immediately and confidently. "We saw a man named Damos attacking Arceus when he appears. He's the one in the jail, right?" She turned her big, suddenly tear-filled eyes towards him. "Please, don't let my brother and our friends stay down there with that man."

"Attacking him? I assure you, young lady, he won't be able to get out of that cell." Marcus nodded to them. "Did your brother mention how Damos attacked, and if it worked? That way we can make sure it doesn't happen"

"Lightning, but it didn't work," she answered quickly. "Neither did throwing boulders on him. He said it was horrible, but it didn't matter. Arceus just got really mad and destroyed everything."

"What about Silver Water?" He spoke quickly and urgently, startling both of the girls. Neither one

of them had ever heard of that before, and if Misty didn't know about it, there was no way it was based on water pokemon. Not the types they knew, at least. The man shook his head and said, "He must not have." Standing up, Marcus looked down at the two of them. "I believe you, and I will do everything I can to stop Damos. We will return the Jewel of Life to Arceus as soon as he appears."

"Oh thank you!" Dawn sounded so relieved that Misty wanted to applaud the younger girl. The redhead watched him pick up a staff as he walked around the table towards them. Damos claimed that he was a backstabber, and there was something off about him, but at the same time they couldn't be sure. He seemed to genuinely want to give Arceus back the Jewel of Life, and there was always the chance that it was Damos lying to them.

Marcus was the one that slapped those cuffs on Ash's wrists though, and for that, Misty chose to regard him with skepticism. A good person didn't do that to someone.

He held the staff towards them, pressing a button and revealing a glowing orb. Misty inhaled sharply when she realized what it was.

"This is the Jewel of Life, and you will return it to him."

"Me?" Misty repeated with confusion, realizing that he was talking to her.

"Why yes. We can't trust a task like that to a young girl." Dawn bristled at that but didn't protest. Marcus faced away from them, bringing the staff out of sight and closing it with a snap. "Damos will not expect you to have it." He held out the staff to her. "Take it."

Misty hesitated. On one hand, she wanted to grab it and run as fast as she could to give it back to Arceus, but on the other, they weren't supposed to change time, were they? That's what Gary said, at least. If they weren't supposed to change time though, then why would Dialga send them back in the first place?

A loud bang distracted all of them. Marcus ran towards the doors leading to a balcony, just as a soldier ran by. "What was that?"

"The prisons! A magical creature got in and let all of the prisoners out!" The soldier yelled back.

"All of them?"

"All of them!"

Misty liked to think that, in relationship with Ash, she was the one with a good head on her shoulders. She thought things out most of the time, trying to plan what she was going to do and why, while Ash leapt full-steam ahead. He often argued that when she got going, she could be just like him. It was something she denied, and it was something that she couldn't deny in that moment.

She launched forward, ripping the staff out of Marcus' hand before the man even realized what she was doing. Spinning around, she grabbed a very startled Dawn's wrist and pulled her as she took off running without looking back. A guard tried to stop them, but she was quick to knock him back with the staff.

Forget what Gary said, she was going to shape her own destiny.

...

When he first left home at the age of ten, Gary liked to think that he was easily the most mature of the four people leaving Pallet at the time. In retrospect, that title probably went to Leaf, but to ten-

year-old Gary, he couldn't do any wrong. When he was alone, he planned out where he was going to travel and what he was going to do, but the second he was in public or ran into someone he knew, especially if it was Ash, he became an impulsive idiot. It was something he realized in retrospect, and it was something that he wanted to change. Gone were the cheerleaders and the flashy car (what a waste of his parents money that had been), and instead he let himself be the real Gary Oak.

Ever since then, he liked to think things over, plan things out. With Ash, that rarely ever happened and it was actually amazing how well things ended up working for the boy when he ran on his instincts.

Ash was the only that randomly told all of his pokemon to let all of the prisoners out, causing mass chaos and panic. No one noticed the three of them, plus Damos, slipping away.

"I need to find the Jewel of Life," Damos said quickly as they slipped into a semi-quiet alley way.
"I must return it to Arceus. The sun will go dark soon and he will come."

Gary looked up towards the sky, the tell-tale darkening that accompanied a solar eclipse slowly starting.

"We need to find Misty and Dawn. Our pokemon too," Ash argued with him. "Aren't you worried about your family?"

"I am," Damos agreed with a sigh. "But it is my duty to put Arceus first."

"Ri rio ri riolu," Ria spoke up, pointing down the alley and hopping forward. She looked back at them expectantly, but backed up some when a guard rushed by.

"We need to find some place to lay low, just for a few minutes," Brock insisted, peering around the corner. "This place is crazy right now." He looked towards Ash. "Ria could find Misty and Dawn and then lead them to us, couldn't she?"

Ash looked down at her, and the Riolu nodded her head, pounding her paw to her chest. The raven-haired boy looked back up and said, "Yeah. She'll be able to find us."

"Do you know any places we could go?" Brock directed this question at Damos, who seemed just as ready as Ash to take off into the mess of shouting people.

The man sighed and then nodded his head. "Yes. Yes, you're right. Follow me." He moved quietly down the alley, looking left and right for people. "Come."

"Ria, find them, then find us, okay? Be careful." Ash urged his little pokemon, unable to hide the worry that crept into his voice.

"Ri!" She nodded her head and then bolted, jumping higher than Gary had ever seen a Riolu jump, running across the roof-tops.

"She'll be okay," he assured his childhood friend. "Come on."

"Yeah." Ash slowly nodded his head, and the two of them rushed after Damos and Brock. They stood out like sore thumbs, earning many double-takes from different people as they ran through the sculpted streets. No one bothered to stop them though.

Their trip was quick and, considering the chaos they left behind, rather uneventful. They found themselves in front of a stone building that looked much like the others, though a little bit bigger.

Damos took a deep breath and pushed the door open.

There was silence, then out of the darkness a squeal sounded. "Daddy!" A little boy with the same bright blue eyes as Damos rushed out, throwing himself at the man. Damos laughed, scooping him up and throwing him into the air with relief.

"Dad!" Another boy around their age, followed a young girl and a woman around the man's age hurried into the room.

"You're right," the woman almost sobbed in relief as she hugged him tightly. "When you didn't come home, I feared the worst."

It took Gary a full minute to realize that this must have been Damos' family. He knew that Damos was Sheena's ancestor, so he had to have kids to make that possible, but when he watched the man order the pokemon to attack Arceus, that thought had never even occurred to him. Yet here he was smiling, laughing and hugging his family, looking nothing at all like the man with dead eyes that Dialga showed them.

"Pichu pi!" A Pichu with a strange, spiked ear rushed in, climbing up Damos' shoulder and nuzzling him. Following him were two other pokemon that actually squealed when they saw them.

"Pikachu! Piplup!" Ash cried out, and both the pokemon rushed over. Pikachu launched himself into Ash's arms, nuzzling his face into his jacket while Ash closed his eyes and squeezed him tightly.

"Pip piplup?" The water-type looked around Gary's legs and out the door curiously.

"Ria went to get Dawn and Misty," Brock assured the pokemon. "They'll be here soon. What I'd like to know is how you got here."

"Pichu has been rescuing other magical monsters from Marcus," the young girl said, blinking up at them curiously. "Who are you and why do you look weird?"

"We have much to explain," Damos told his family, "and not much time to do so. Come, sit. Marcus could come here at a moment's notice." They did what he said, all with grim expressions. Gary got the distinct impression that it wasn't going to be a fun chat for anyone, and really hoped that Ria would show up with the girls soon.

...

"Did you really need to clock that guy in the head with the Jewel?" Dawn asked Misty, sounding completely exasperated with the older girl.

"Technically it was just the staff, but yes," Misty answered without any regret or hesitation. "He grabbed my arm. A friendly soaking from Politoad wasn't enough." The green pokemon in question just shrugged when Dawn looked at her.

No one seemed to really care about the two girls and a few pokemon running in the chaos. The only time anyone did a double-take was when they saw the staff that Misty carried with her, wielding it as an extra weapon. She didn't worry about the Jewel of Life breaking. Arceus himself said that it wouldn't. So instead it got used like a baseball bat.

"Rio!" A small voice squeaked, causing both girls to stop and look up. Ria jumped down from the rooftops, landing in front of them neatly. "Riolu ri lu!"

"Everyone else is okay." Misty knew without a doubt that Ria would have never left Ash if he was hurt.

"Ria, we need to find Piplup and Pikachu," Dawn spoke to the Riolu almost desperately. "Can you tell us where they are?"

"Ri." She nodded her head and motioned for them to follow behind her.

...

It was an awkward talk about betrayal and people seeing the future in dreams, but Damos' wife didn't blink an eye, quickly offering them drinks and something to eat so they wouldn't be running on empty stomachs. Then they all began pulling a few belongings together, just in case they needed to run.

With so many people hurrying around, Gary found it easier to stay out of the way, sitting against one of the stone walls underneath a window that had busted open. Ash joined him, though Brock seemed eager to help or do something while they waited for Ria to return.

Gary watched them all with interest. The two young children seemed to argue a lot, though the older one kept prompting them to keep working. It was strange in a way, because it made him feel so nostalgic even though he was an only child. Ash shifted beside him, and it suddenly clicked. They reminded him of himself, Ash and Leaf when they were younger. He and Ash would be the ones arguing but not really meaning it, while Leaf would try to keep the peace, though she would often fail and get dragged into the silly fights that ended five minutes later. They were like a family.

Until they weren't.

Gary frowned a bit, knowing that it was probably one of the worst times to think this way. "It was my fault, wasn't it?"

Ash had been fiddling with the cuff on one of his wrists again, though he looked up at the question. Tilting his head, he narrowed his bright brown eyes. "How could all of this be your fault?"

"No," he shook his head, strands of his now-dirty brown hair falling into his eyes. "I just...those kids remind me of us in a way and it was my fault that you, me and Leaf stopped being friends, isn't it?"

Ash's shoulders slumped a bit. He looked away and said, "Your parents and your aunt died. It wasn't your fault you were sad."

"For a while," Gary agreed, his chest tightening at the mention of his long-deceased mother and father, as well as his father's sister. "But afterwards, how I treated you, how I got everyone else to treat you..." He trailed off, knowing full-well that he had been the worst bully in Ash's life. He was not only his main antagonist, but he was the one that prompted more people to pick on the young boy. "I wasn't nearly as bad to Leaf but that was wrong too."

"I pushed her away," Ash admitted sadly, his fingers running over the bruised skin on his other hand, once again giving up on yanking at the cuff. "Not in a mean way, we just stopped talking a little less every day. I didn't want her to be able to hurt me like you." He spoke so bluntly, that it almost startled Gary. "Misty was the first friend I had that didn't turn her back on me when things got bad."

"Pikapi." Pikachu had been sitting quietly beside Ash, leaning to them talk. He jumped up onto his

lap, licking the bruised skin a bit and looking up at him with sad eyes.

"First human friend," Ash corrected himself, a very small smile appearing on his face as he rubbed Pikachu's head. He looked up at Gary. "I know your parents died. Mom told me how that changes people but...why?"

Why had he lashed out at his best friend? That was something Gary wasn't sure he could answer, and he wasn't going to insult Ash by making something up. "I don't know." His green eyes looked to the floor. "It just hurt so much but...you and Leaf. You guys never had your fathers and you were able to smile and be so happy and hold yourself together. Neither of you knew what it was like to hurt that much over your own parents, even though neither of you had your fathers. It's so stupid, but I wanted you to hurt with me, I guess." He shook his head. "It's inexcusable, and I get why Leaf talks to me, but she'd also be the first one to break my face without warning. And you. I understand why you get so defensive." He shook his head again. "It doesn't matter, but I'm sorry." Though he himself had long accepted Ash as a friend rather than a bitter rival, never once had he apologized for the way he used to act.

"It's not okay, but I forgive you. I was no angel myself." Gary looked up at Ash and saw completely sincerity in his eyes. How he could actually forgive him for years of bullying and harassment was beyond him. Maybe Ash saw the confusion on his face, but the other boy continued to talk. "I'm like Damos, you know. Just like him. In our time, the legendary pokemon call me their Chosen One. So I guess...I guess everything that's been happening made me realize that holding grudges, letting it build up to something horrible, it doesn't help anyone."

Gary wanted to laugh at Ash's words. No, Gary wanted to laugh at the entire situation. He was sitting beside Ash Ketchum, thousands of years in the past, watching a family run around like crazy after they broke out of a prison, having a random heart-to-heart about something that happened years ago, and apparently on top of that Ash could use Aura and was some sort of Chosen One to the legendary pokemon. It was actually really ridiculous and it made absolute sense in his mind.

"Of course you are," the brunet said with a laugh. Ash stared at him with confusion. "What? It makes sense. You're right, you're nowhere near an angel but...you're probably one of the best people I know." He raised an eyebrow at him. "Just don't let that go to your head."

"Gary..." Ash trailed off before smiling a bit. "Thanks."

He nodded his head. "That must be a lot of pressure even with your Aura. It might not make up for when we were little, but if you need something, I got your back." Gary raised an eyebrow at him. "Even if it's just advice on girls. You seem to need it."

"Gary," this time the word came out sounding completely annoyed.

"What? You two have been acting horrible with each other. You more than her. Don't give me that look, it's true." Gary looked up at Damos' wife as she spoke to her husband quietly, and he frowned a bit. "I've been a bit of a jerk to people, including girls, but you know...sometimes attraction...fades away." He shrugged. "It's nothing to be ashamed of but I learned that clinging to it just makes it worse." The green-eyed boy looked back at his friend. "If that's what's happening, don't keep stringing her along. It's not fair."

Ash stared at him sharply at first, probably wondering why Gary thought he could even give him advice, but the more he spoke, the more he could see Ash waver. His brown eyes looked towards the floor sadly, but with contemplation. "It's not."

"Pip!" Piplup squeaked loudly, startling everyone. He bolted to the door, as it opened, Ria entering without a care in the world. She caught sight of Ash and Pikachu, running over to them, looking quite proud of herself. Piplup on the other hand latched onto the blue-haired girl that walked in.

"Piplup!" Dawn laughed, scooping up her partner and hugging him tightly. She opened her eyes and looked up at Damos with a slightly embarrassed expression. "Sorry for just barging in."

Damos might have said something back to her, but Gary wasn't paying attention to that. He looked towards the door as Misty walked in, blinking with surprise when he recognized the staff in her hand. He was about to ask her how the hell she got it, but his words died before they could even begin to form. She was looking at the ground, sea green eyes so sad that she was actually almost to tears.

She looked over at them, but when she caught Ash's eye, she looked back to the ground. Gary's first thought was that something horrible happened to them, even if Dawn seemed to be acting normal, but Ash inhaled sharply beside him and said, "She heard."

It took him a moment to realize what Ash meant and his heart sank a bit. Gary didn't mean to hurt anyone, he just wanted to help Ash out. Hearing him not only tell Ash that he should basically break up with her if he didn't want her anymore, but hearing Ash agree to it in a way was probably the last thing she wanted to hear.

"The Jewel of Life!" Damos suddenly cried out, breaking the tension in the air and distracting them all. "How'd you get it?"

"I took it," Misty spoke, her voice cracking a little bit.

"This is good. We can get up to the temple before Marcus and return it," the man said eagerly. "Come, we must move swiftly." He looked towards his family. "If anyone comes, be ready to run. Pichu will protect you." They all nodded.

Damos took the staff out of Misty's hand and said, "Are you ready?"

Misty kept her eyes on the ground as she nodded her head. Ash was staring at her blankly as he stood up, and Gary just looked back and fourth between them with guilt. Brock and Dawn looked confused, but they both still nodded to Damos.

There was no time for petty personal drama. The sky was getting dark and they had the Jewel of Life. Now was the time to act. They could discuss everything else that was happening later.

Even if it ended with a broken heart.

Chapter End Notes

I wasn't sure if I wanted to update this on the last day of 2014 or the first day of 2015. I decided to go out of the year with a sort-of cliffhanger. Don't get mad at me yet, there's still more to come!

Just to confirm it though: Damos IS the Chosen One from his time. Exact same as Ash. That's why he has Aura.

This part with Gary was part of the reason it was so important to have him appear in a fic, at least to me. There's so much of Ash's past that's unexplored, but two people know what happened because they were there for it. While Leaf's appearance in Distortion did help with this a bit, she also had a highly relevant and practical role in the plot itself. Gary is the voice of reason at times, but more than anything in the anime, I find he's the representation of Ash's past. His role here is much more character related than it is plot related. Not to say that he didn't impact it at all. He did and he's going to keep making a difference.

Again, thank you so much to my awesome beta reader, CLAVUS. I hope you have an awesome New Years!

The same thing goes to all my readers. So many of you have stuck around from the very beginning of Mystery of Aura when it was just a silly little rewrite with some added character growth and pokeshipping. That was planned as a one-time story with no sequels and look at where we are now. It's New Years Eve and I'm posting the 7th chapter of the 5th instalment!

I can't even believe I'm on the 7th chapter. It feels like yesterday I was struggling to write some scenes in Distortion. What happened?

I wish you all the best in 2015!

Written by: Skylight Sparkle

Edited by: CLAVUS

No Where Left To Run

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

At the age of ten, Ash Ketchum could tell you without a doubt who he was and who he was going to be. He was from Pallet Town, his mother was Delia Ketchum, and he was going to be the world's greatest Pokemon Master. He spoke with such conviction and arrogance that people either believed him or flat-out thought he was crazy. He was energetic, cocky and self-centered, only thinking about his own goals and what he wanted from life. He was brash and ignorant, running into dangerous situations without any understanding of the bigger picture of the world. He was a lazy slob, expecting everyone else to do the things he didn't want to do.

There was always bits and pieces of truth in the words of others, and he was no exception. He was those things but not nearly to the extreme that some people claimed, and never all at once. Gary managed to convince almost all of their peers, barring Leaf, that Ash was that bad. The first person to see through that rough and immature exterior wasn't a person at all, but a Pikachu that had despised his very existence at first. The first real person (that wasn't his mother) to see him for who he was had been Misty.

At the age of ten, Ash Ketchum would never admit it to anyone else but Pikachu, but he realized that he didn't know how to be a friend. A part of him, a part that he tried to keep hidden, was terrified at the thought of actually letting someone into his life too much, giving them the chance to hurt him like the person he once thought of as his best friend, and most of the others he used to get along with. So he instinctively hid parts of himself, acting cocky and a little rude at times. Somehow, Pikachu, Misty, Brock and all of his other pokemon ended up worming their way into his heart. No matter how many times he and Misty fought, she never betrayed his trust. No matter how many stupid decision he made in battles, Pikachu still gave him the benefit of the doubt. No matter how immature he could act at times, Brock never fully believed that it was all he was. They were his first friends in such a long time, and in retrospect, Ash knew he wouldn't be the person he was now without them.

He became less afraid, and started showing all of the other sides of himself that he kept hidden for so long. Ash Ketchum would never hesitate to help someone, to put his own life on the line if it meant another could be safe. He kept in touch with his friends and cherished them with all of the small acts that he never really thought about. He pushed others to reach their goals, not just using them to peruse his own dreams.

The way he could so quickly gain the trust of others, the way he could make friends almost as quickly as he met them, was proof of this. He could still be brash, arrogant, and a little dense at times, but there was so much more to him than that. Ash knew that about himself and embraced it.

Yet, somehow, at the age of fourteen, Ash Ketchum wasn't quite sure who he was supposed to be anymore. Reality wasn't always conducive to dreams, and reality was, he wasn't at all who he thought he was when he first left home. If that made any sense at all. Ash wanted to be the world's greatest Pokemon Master still, that dream had never wavered, but he was part of something bigger than that. The funny thing he realized after a lot of thought, was that he couldn't even complain, claiming that he never would have chosen to be the one to save the world himself. He had done that long before he ever heard the words 'Chosen One' uttered to him seriously. He was a Pokemon Trainer, that he could accept, he was a friend to many people, and that was fine. Even the idea of being able to use Aura was something that he learned to embrace. The title of 'boyfriend'

sometimes threw him for a loop, but that happened less and less as the months ticked by. The thing that still didn't sit all that well with him was the title of Chosen One.

He could have conversations with other people about everything else. He even had Riley's number for either emergencies or if he just had questions or wanted to talk. There wasn't another person in the world that he knew of that could understand him about the whole Chosen One thing. How could they?

Now, as they silently followed Damos through the narrow alleys, avoiding the guards and making their way towards the high temple that Arceus was supposed to appear, Ash realized that he had the chance to ask someone else. Damos was just like him, and Ash didn't need his Aura to know that. There was something that felt right about Damos' claim. He knew it was true and there were so many questions that the teenager had for the older man.

Not that he'd get the chance to speak to the man anytime soon. They were in too much of a hurry to take the time to just sit and talk.

Ash silently walked between Gary and Dawn, Pikachu walking beside him while Ria walked in front of Damos. He longed to reach out and grab his little pokemon to keep her safe, she was still fairly young, but she was the only one of them that could use her Aura, and had the job of stopping them should a person come towards them. He was worried for her, but at the same time, he was proud. If he couldn't count on himself, at least he could count on her.

With every passing minute, the sky got darker and Ria got a little more fidgety, looking up at the sky every once and a while. Back in their own time, Ash himself had been able to feel Arceus coming before he even got there, and he had little doubt that it was what his pokemon was feeling at the moment.

Arceus created everything, it made sense for him to have such a powerful Aura. Ash almost wished that he could just sit down and talk to the pokemon, get some answers about why it seemed like the world was going crazy lately, and maybe even some answers about himself.

"We need to split up," Damos said suddenly, startling them all. "Marcus is sure to keep the high ground and he needs to be stopped, but there are secret lower-level passages into the temple so that we can take the Jewel of Life back to Arceus without being caught." He looked directly at Misty. "I'm assuming you fully intend on keeping that with you?"

"Yes." She held it close to her, eyeing him crossly. "Just tell me where to go, I'll be fine on my own." Dawn and Brock both protested in unison. "We don't know what Marcus is planning and we don't have time to argue about it."

Ash knew that she was right about that, but the spike of panic that hit him wasn't going to let her get her way. Despite the fact that he knew that she heard the end of his conversation with Gary back at Damos' home, and the fact that things were more than just a bit stormy between them for the last week, he knew he couldn't let her go alone. "I'm coming with you."

Misty was actually startled that he spoke to her directly. So startled that she didn't even get the chance to argue before he continued to prattle on.

"I can't use my Aura, I'm going to be about as useful as a blind-man in target practice to everyone else." He looked at them all confidently. "You need to stop Marcus, and we'll get the Jewel back to Arceus."

"Ash," Gary said, his voice lowering a bit. "We can't change things." His viridian eyes narrowed at

him.

He thought about that for a moment, pressing his lips together and then shaking his head. "We make our own destinies." Looking towards Damos, Ash caught Pikachu as he jumped into his arms again. "Where do we go?"

"Those rocky ledges down there hide the entrances," Damos pointed down below them. "Be careful, it's quite steep and during this time of year, worse than normal."

"Ri rio ri!" Ria jumped over to Ash, clenching her tiny paw.

"Yeah, you can come with us." He assured her. "Lead the way."

"Wait!" Dawn surged forward, grabbing Ash's jacket in one hand and Misty's in the other. Her blue eyes were wide with desperation. "Be careful."

He blinked down at her, slightly startled by the sudden action, and then looked at Misty. They stared at one another for a moment before turning their eyes back to Dawn at the same time.

"We'll be fine," Misty assured her soothingly. "Go kick some a... butt. Go kick some butt."

Dawn sniffled and laughed before she took a step back, holding her clenched fist in front of her. "You know it."

Ash smiled at her response, looking at Brock and Gary in turn. Both of them appeared worried, but neither of them were about to step in and stop them. For that, he was eternally grateful. Ash might not have been able to use his Aura, but he knew that this was what he was supposed to do.

"Lets go," Misty said stiffly, turning away from him and walking towards the cliffs.

"Pi?" Pikachu looked at Ash curiously. He nodded and went after her, Ria leaping up in front of the girl to lead the way.

"Come on, we must move swiftly!" Ash heard Damos exclaim behind them, followed by the sounds of footsteps hurrying in the opposite direction.

Then there was nothing but silence and the sound of their footsteps as they made their way down the steep staircases that turned into steep, icy cliffs.

Despite the thick tension stifling the air, they exchanged worried looks. Misty held the staff tightly in one arm, her other holding onto the side of the cliff as she carefully started to descend after Ria. Ash followed her, Pikachu scurrying behind him.

Misty gasped as she stumbled a bit on a patch of ice. Ash's free arm shot out, grabbing her hip to keep her steady even if she was able to get her footing back herself. She didn't say anything, but kept her eyes on the ground and shrugged him off.

Ash stared at her sadly, glancing back at Pikachu as the mouse muttered his name. Ash just smiled and shook his head, continuing to scale down the cliff in silence.

...

There was something incredibly eerie about setting foot in the exact same spot that they had stood watching Arceus fall the first time. Whatever that was, a potential thing that could happen or another timeline all together, Brock didn't know. What he did know was that things were definitely

different this time around. A part of him thought about what Gary said, about changing time and creating paradoxes, but things were already so different now.

They followed Damos up higher, pausing as the eclipse darkened the sky. At the exact same moment, a circle of light appeared, Arceus himself flying out of it just as leisurely as they had been shown before. The pokemon had no idea of what had been happening or what was going to happen, and that was terrifying.

"Come!" Damos urged them as he ran up the stairs. Brock, Dawn and Gary followed him as quickly as they could into the temple, nearly colliding with the man as he came to a sudden stop.

"What's wrong?" Dawn asked, blue eyes flashing with worry.

"Marcus should be here." Damos took a few steps forward, looking around the platform that they were on. "Where is he?"

They all looked around, trying to catch a glimpse of the man in red, but they were quickly distracted by Arceus' golden glow as he floated inside, looking around almost curiously. "It is time to return the Jewel of Life."

...

One they were inside the tunnels, getting into the temple was actually pretty easy, though Ash could definitely see why people wouldn't explore the cliffs and discover them, especially not in winter. They walked along the smoothed out tunnels until they reached a staircase that led down to a hallway with an open door at the end. Just outside of that was a wooden platform, and the same room that they saw Marcus attack Arceus in before.

Now all they could do was wait for Arceus himself to show up and give him back the Jewel of Life.

It was eerily quiet, and without his Aura, Ash had absolutely no way to distract himself. Ria was shifting a little bit in the corner, Pikachu watching whatever she was doing curiously. She was keeping her back to them though, so Ash decided to just leave her alone with whatever she was doing. He could have released his other pokemon, but they were trying to keep the sound down to a minimum. All that left him with as a distraction was Misty's deep breathing. He knew that she was only breathing like that because of their mad dash down the corridor, but it still made him feel almost sick.

"I heard what you and Gary were talking about earlier." Her voice, though only a whisper, broke through the silence like the crack of a whip. "About attraction fading and things like that." Ash already knew that, but he kept in the outburst that threatened to escape him. Misty stared at the ground, drawing shapes in the dusty wooden floor with the staff that she was still holding. "And I was thinking...maybe he was right."

"What?" Ash stared at her blankly, trying to figure out how to respond to that. He felt a rush of a hundred different types of emotions, and wasn't quite sure what to do with it all. He wasn't even able to keep them from showing on his face. "You think so?"

Misty was going to say yes, but she hesitated. That would be a very easy way to answer, but it would be a lie. Her real answer put her heart out there and that was completely terrifying. She always kind of knew that being boyfriend and girlfriend was more than just being friends that held hands and kissed, that for things to really work in the long run would require a lot of trust and faith in each other. It still scared her to the point where she was almost shaking.

"No." She finally answered. "No, that's not what I think at all right now, but...but if it's what you feel..." It wouldn't be fair for them to continue on if he didn't feel anything anymore. That's what she wanted to say, but the words couldn't make it pass her lips.

"No!" He sunk down a little bit, embarrassed at how desperate that actually sounded. "I mean...no that's not what I want. When I agreed with Gary it was about how that wouldn't be fair, you know, in general. Not that it was what I thought." He glanced over at her, and was relieved to see that she looked relieved. Then her eyebrows furrowed and her lips pressed together.

"Then what's wrong? You've been snappy and bossy all week! It's like you don't trust me. You were fine at Christmas!" She knew that she hadn't helped things much either, being just as snide and snarky to him as he was to her.

"Home is safe." Ash looked down at his hands. "I'm sorry, I just...I'm stupid." He shook his head. "After Shaymin poisoned you...I just...I dunno." Misty wanted to say something, but she had the feeling that Ash really wanted to try and get out whatever it was he was struggling with. His eyes flickered left and right, settling on her before looking away again, the pattern repeating over. He was fiddling with the edge of his sleeves and shifting slightly.

"Ash, I—."

"I care about you a lot and I freaked out at the thought of you getting hurt and that made me act like a jerk and I'm sorry I never felt like this before and it's really messing with my head like I don't even understand," Ash blurried out, jumbling the words all together that it took her a few moments to realize what he was saying. "And now my Aura's gone and I can barely walk without having to look at the ground cause I'm bound to trip over something and I just—I just don't know what I'm doing anymore." He looked so embarrassed as he looked down at the floor.

Then it clicked together and she felt her cheeks flushing. He wasn't acting more possessive, he was being a little too overprotective because he didn't know where the boundaries for that were. He was worried because he cared, and that scared and confused him a lot. Misty wanted to hit herself. She always knew that she was a few steps ahead of him in understanding not only what was going on, but what she felt. It never once occurred to her, if she was struggling to figure out what she was feeling and who she was in regards to him, that he might be struggling even more with the same thing.

This was the exact opposite of what she was worried about. This was good.

Ash stared blankly as she started laughing. He scowled a little bit and was about to tell her that it wasn't nice to laugh at him after he spilled his heart out to her, but then she dropped the staff and threw her arms around his shoulders, hugging him with such force that his back collided with the stone wall behind him. She hugged him and buried her face into the crook of his neck, her shoulders shaking from laughter. He was more than just a little confused, but then he still hugged her back because he honestly missed the hugs that weren't just because something bad was happening.

"Ri?"

"Why are you laughing?" The brown-eyed boy asked, looking down at the top of her head with confusion, ignoring his pokemon.

"Riori."

"I'm happy, numbskull." The girl shifted so that she was kneeling beside him, arms still awkwardly

around him. "I thought you were tired of me or that your Aura..." Misty trailed off.

"My Aura what?" Ash pressed curiously.

"Riori?"

"That it was changing you." She shook her head. "I know it's not, you don't have to tell me that. It was stupid. I was just worried."

The pokemon trainer shifted away from her a bit, moving so that they were kneeling in front of each other, knees pressed together. He grabbed her hands and then nodded towards the cuffs on his wrists. "If I had the chance to take them off...would you...I mean...do you want me to keep them on? Keep it away?"

"Riii."

"No!" Her head snapped up and she stared at him with sheer surprise. "No, no, no! Mew, no! I was being stupid. Your Aura...being the Chosen One, that doesn't make you who you are, Ash. It never has and it never will. Even if that is true, I know that it's a part of you and that's pretty awesome, to be honest." Misty shook her head. "Besides, you'll always be that overly energetic, slightly idiotic, pokemon-loving kid I fished out of the river."

Ash laughed and squeezed her hands tightly, not really sure what to say to that, but appreciating it all the same.

"Riori!" Ria yelled at them, startling both of the teenagers. They looked over at the fiercely annoyed pokemon, who was positively glaring at them while Pikachu seemed more amused than anything else.

"Sorry," Ash muttered to her, unable to stop smiling. "Is he here?"

She shook her head and moved in close to them. She put her paws over the cuffs on his hands and closed her eyes.

"Ria," he said with a stern but gentle voice. "You can't use Aura on this. It doesn't work."

"Rio ri riolu lu ri!" She shook her head viciously. There was a small spark of pink light in her hands that startled both of the trainers. Pikachu's ears twitched and he jerked away in shock.

"I don't think she's trying to," Misty muttered. "I think she might be trying to use psychic." Ria nodded her head.

"Can Riolu even learn that?"

"Pi," Pikachu shook his head. "Pi pikachu pi ka cha pika."

"Only Lucario can?" Ash repeated, and electric-type nodded, but Ria just growled defiantly.

Ria focused, and it was like the air around them was crackling. Her whole body started to glow with her Aura, her entire body starting to shake. She grunted with frustration, exhaustion and a bit of pain but didn't back down. "RI-O-LU!" There was a sudden burst of dark pink light from her chest that mingled with her aura, fading into it. Her eyes snapped open, glowing the same colour. "Riori!"

The pink glow surrounded the cuffs, and suddenly, Ash could feel again. It was faint but at the

same time so strong and wonderful that he grasped onto it, not wanting to let the feeling go. He used his Aura to lash out, throwing the cuffs from his wrists and his world exploded into warmth, light and colours. It was so overwhelming that he wanted to laugh and cry at the same time. Ria sighed with relief and sunk to the floor, snuggling into Pikachu's fur like a baby with their favourite plush toy, as he came over to keep her up.

Once he was sure that Ria was okay, just tired, Ash looked at Misty, using the hands that he was still holding to yank her forward into a kiss. She made a small, startled sound, but then she tugged her hands from his and wrapped them around his neck, pulling him closer. The bitterness and anger was completely gone, replaced with warmth and understanding.

"Pikapi! Pikachupi!" Sometimes they could ignore Pikachu, but the alarm in his voice was enough to make them abruptly break apart. In a slightly twisted way, Ash almost relished the feeling of panic radiating from his friend if only because it meant that he could feel it at all now.

That feeling almost immediately went away and Ash's eyes widened with horror. The staff was sitting beside them, and either one of the pokemon had hit it or one of them did and didn't realize it, but the top was open, and it was empty.

"Where did it go?" Misty asked with alarm, jerking to her feet quickly and all of the warm feelings that had been rushing through her instantly vanished. "Did I kick it, where is it?"

Ash stood up, feeling like he could move so much easier than before. He grabbed her arm to stop her from running off to try and find it, slowly shaking his head before meeting her eyes. "I don't think it was ever here."

"Marcus wanted me to think I was returning it..." Her sea green eyes widened with horror. "He must still have it."

...

"Where are Misty and Ash?" Dawn whispered, her dark eyes darting left and right with worry. "Do you think they fell?"

Brock didn't answer, and that was a little more unsettling than if he actually had. Dawn just took a deep breath and shook her head, leaning forward to get a better look down into the empty hall below them. She gasped as her hand slipped on the ice covered stone, and she started to pitch forward. Gary grabbed her waist, pulling her back so that her feet were once again secure on the ground.

"Careful there, female Ash," he quipped with a shake of his head. She stared at him oddly and Gary clarified. "What? You're supposed to be his sister here, and sometimes it shows."

Dawn shook her head and was about to reply, but stopped as a golden light appeared at the massive, open doors. She looked around, taking a few steps back as Arceus appeared. Her breath caught in her throat and her fingers curled against the stone in front of her.

"It is time to return the Jewel of Life." Arceus sounded so calm as he glided by the alter, curiously looking around, no doubt seeking out Damos or at least someone else. "Damos?"

"Damos isn't coming." Marcus' voice echoed through the chamber, and everyone looked above them. Damos growled under his breath and ran back down the stairs without another word. Dawn almost wanted to run after him, but she was so fixated on the scene before her that she couldn't even get her legs to move.

"What?" Arceus approached Marcus, his body tensing up. "Did something happen to him?" He sounded so genuinely worried that it was actually a little startling. The Arceus that they all briefly met had been so enraged, so unsympathetic that it was strange to hear him be the opposite.

"He intended on betraying you," Marcus said with a shake of his head.

"It can't be," Arceus denied, narrowing his green and red eyes. "Damos would never."

"He didn't!" Dawn jumped as Misty's panicked yell echoed through the chamber. She leaned forward again to see the redhead run out onto the plain wooden platform at the edge of a stone door. From their point of view, they could all see Ash try to grab her arm to get her to stop, but she went around him and kept going. Ash shook his head and ran out after her, panic on his face.

Something definitely wasn't right.

"That is Damos' staff," Arceus noted as he glided down from Marcus, towards them. He looked at Misty closely before turning his attention towards Ash. "What are...this is not possible."

"They are part of Damos' plan!" Marcus' voice interrupted. "Look inside of the staff, the Jewel if nowhere to be found. They were sent as a distraction."

"No! No it's not true!" Misty pleaded again. "You gotta believe us! We're not a distraction! It's true, it's not in here." She opened it, and Dawn inhaled sharply when she realized that it was, in fact, empty. "But we didn't do this. Marcus did!"

"Oh, but you are a distraction," Marcus' calm voice interrupted the sound Arceus was starting to make. The second the words left his lips, there was an explosion of light as the electric pokémon they hadn't even noticed before unleashed their attacks on Arceus.

Dawn screamed, but the sound was overpowered by the pokémon's agonizing cries of pain.

"What the hell is that?" Gary yelled, leaning forward to look down at something. He wasn't staring at Arceus now, but rather the bottom of the temple, where the bottom of the pools of water were slowly opening, the water flowing out of it. This was something new, something that hadn't happened in the other past that Dialga showed them.

"Now!" Marcus' voice rose above the chaos. "The Silver Water!"

Dawn gasped, her hands flying over her mouth.

"Attacking him? I assure you, young lady, he won't be able to get out of that cell." Marcus nodded to them. "Did your brother mention how Damos attacked, and if it worked? That way we can make sure it doesn't happen"

"Lightning, but it didn't work," she answered quickly. "Neither did throwing boulders on him. He said it was horrible, but it didn't matter. Arceus just got really mad and destroyed everything."

"What about Silver Water?"

"No, no, no, no," she mumbled desperately, ignoring Piplup's worried coos. A loud creaks and clangs of metal scraping and banging against other sheets of metal echoed around them as the room started to shake. A dull roar rose up from above them, and the three trainers had just enough time to look up to see a torrent of silver liquid spew fall down from above, slamming into Arceus.

Wincing, they all drew back from the intense heat, but there was no way that they could escape

Arceus' agonizing yells as he was thrown down into the massive pit below. The electric-type pokemon attacked again, the crackling of their lightning blocking out the sound of stones grinding and sliding open above them as more and more of the hot, sparkling water was released.

"It's not water!" Gary cried out as some splashed by them. "I think it's some type of metal!"

"What do we do?" Dawn shrieked as she backed into Brock, who put a hand on her shoulder to keep her up right. "We need to do something!"

"It would need pipes to come through, right?" Brock looked towards Gary. "Think we could block it, somehow?"

"Stop the flow?" Gary looked above them, viridian eyes narrowing slightly before he nodded.
"Risky, but it's all we've got right now."

"What about Ash and Misty?"

"They'll be fine," Brock assured Dawn. "Come on, we need to stop this."

She looked back down, unable to see anything beyond the blinding light of the electricity and the glow of the Silver Water. The young girl didn't like it, but they'd just have to have faith that their friends, that this whole situation, would be alright.

...

A torrent of hot, bubbling silver slammed into the wooden platform that Ash and Misty were standing on. Ash grabbed a hold of Misty arm with one hand, using the other to throw out a random shield in hopes that it would stop anything from flying at them, be it the metal or the wooden debris. They stumbled back into the safety of the stone passageway, landing on the ground with a hard thud.

"We told him," Misty gasped out as she pushed herself up off the ground. "Dawn and I... I didn't think." Her hands clasped tightly around the staff in her hands, turning her knuckles white.

Ash looked down at Arceus's prone form, feeling the warm golden light lashing out at the attacks that rained down upon him. "He's fighting back but I don't know..." He looked up to where Marcus was, eyes narrowing and lips pressing together when he saw Marcus holding the Jewel of Life, a satisfied smirk on the man's face. Now that he wasn't blind to everything, he could feel just how twisted, greedy and angry Marcus was. He never would have trusted him if he truly got to reach out before they slapped those cuffs on him.

"Pikapi." Pikachu's ears twitched and he nodded his small head, Ria pumping her fist beside him.

Ash nodded his head and turned to Misty. "I'm going after Marcus."

The Gym Leader's sea-green eyes had been locked onto Arceus below them, but they snapped up to him when he spoke. An absolutely fierce expression passed over her face. "Good. I need to punch him in the face to make myself feel better." There was no questioning her words or tone of voice, she was going with him and nothing he said or did would change her mind.

Ash nodded his head, but held out a hand when she was about to drop the staff. "Keep it. We can put the Jewel back in it when we get it. Safer probably."

Misty weighed the object in her hand. "Eh, I like it anyway. It's good for bashing heads."

The pokemon trainer eyed her oddly but chose not to comment on that. Instead, he turned and started running up the stone stairs, hearing her, Pikachu and Ria bounding after him. They needed to move fast, because reality was, they were completely out of time.

Chapter End Notes

Written by: Skylight Sparkle

Edited by: CLAVUS

Descent To Desperation

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

There was no warm, flickering of torches, no golden glow from Arceus, and certainly no blinding flashes of electricity to light the way through the tunnels. Isolated from the rest of the past, Gary was willing to pull out his flashlight, relieved to see that it actually worked.

"What's the plan?" Dawn asked him, fanning her face as the tunnels got warmer and warmer.

"We just need to block the flow of the Silver Water," Gary replied, pushing an auburn fringe out of his eyes. "It might not seem like it, but this place is pretty simple. I actually read about these tunnels when we were back home. Nobody was really sure what they were used for, but they were pretty sure that there was a single entrance where liquids originated from before separating into separate tunnels."

Sheena and Kevin said it was probably used for rituals of some sort."

"Yeah, killing a God," the blue-haired girl snapped bitterly before shaking her head. "But how do we stop it?"

"Destroy the room and the supply of molten metal," Brock answered simply enough, grimacing a bit. "Or at least cause some damage to the tunnels. Where do you think they got it all anyway? The metal? A city would normally keep something like that safe. Not melt it down."

Gary shrugged and came to a brief stop when he finally found a set of stairs. Running up them, he tried to compare the route to what he read about before, but there were things that existed now that clearly weren't going to survive to their time. The stairs they were on happened to be one of those things.

Reaching a door at the top, Gary peered inside, hoping to see a room that would be easy to tear apart. What he saw made his green eyes go wide and his tanned skin instantly pale. He backed up, and would have fell back down the steps if it wasn't for Brock grabbing him.

"Whoa, what's wrong?" The young man urged him, worry spreading across his features.

"I...that room is—Dawn don't!" The last part came out as a desperate yell when the young girl was about to walk into the room. She stopped and looked around at him with wide eyes, choosing to heed his advice and stepped back from the door. Gary took a deep breath, running his hands through his hair. "Look, we're going to need a lot of water to cool things off and break this without killing ourselves. We need Misty here." He glanced at Brock pointedly.

It took a moment before the young man nodded his head. "Right. Dawn, run back and yell for Misty. She'll hear you over us. We really need her here, okay?"

Dawn eyed them both suspiciously, but nodded her head, smiling slightly. "No need to worry. We'll be back in a minute." She turned around and ran back down the stairs, Piplup trailing after her.

"What the hell was that about?" Brock demanded as soon as he was sure that Dawn was out of earshot.

"It's not just metal," Gary groaned, feeling a wave of nausea hit him. "There's some there, but it's

not all..." He grimaced and nodded to the door.

Brock peered through it before recoiling almost like the young researcher did. "What, but they..."

"They're melting steel-type pokemon," Gary confirmed almost reluctantly, wishing that he could bleach that image away from his mind. There wasn't a psychic-type around to do that for them at the moment, unfortunately. "We need to shut this thing down."

Brock nodded his head and pulled out a pokeball. "And I know just where to start."

...

In a flash of light, a medium size stone crumbled to the ground in a small, neat pile. Beside it, another identical stone sat in peace, until there was another flash and then it exploded outwards, flinging in all directions.

"Gah!" Ash threw his hand up in front of his face, instinctively blocking the shards of stone as they flew through the air. He opened his eyes again, glaring fiercely. "Ugh, I give up! Why can't I get it to do that?"

A chuckle met his ears, and the teenage boy looked over at the young man that he was with. The man shook his head and said, "I told you again and again, Ash. You need to control and focus more."

"I know but—."

"No buts," Riley interrupted him swiftly, walking towards where the two stones were. "That's especially important for you. Your Aura is the most powerful I've seen or heard of, and if you don't learn to focus it, it can easily become a hazard." He pointed towards the ground. "See, I have more control, and mine crumbled apart, where yours exploded with a greater force. If you could channel it correctly, you would probably turn the stone into dust, not small pebbles."

Ash sighed and moved his cap so that it was facing forward again. "I know. It's not...easy though."

"No, it's not, but keep practicing even when you're not here." Riley stared at him seriously. "Remember, Aura is just energy, and if you don't focus it, it'll disperse at random. There's also limits to how far your reach is, so never try to overexert yourself. Aura uses the energy around you, yes, but in times of crisis you tend to use your own, and that can eat up all the energy inside of you before you even realize it."

Ash nodded his head solemnly. "I understand."

"Good. Ready to try again?"

He twisted his cap backwards once again, clenching his fist in front of him. "You bet!"

...

Thousands of years before that moment in space and time, Ash desperately tried to remember anything that Riley told him that could be useful in this situation. He was coming up blank. Though a part of him wondered why, when things got bad, there were always stairs to tackle at the last moment. Why couldn't it be a nice, flat field without dangerous, massive drops? That would have been nice for once.

There were no big, open fields in the tall temple. There was a long, steep drop that led to an

agonizing mix of molten metal and blinding electricity. Now definitely wasn't the time to use his Aura to jump and bound up a ridiculous amount of stairs. With the way they curved, he was sure to do something stupid like slam into the wall and fall down.

It happened before in a less perilous situation.

The raven-haired boy could hear Misty panting behind him from exertion. The mad dash up the stairs wasn't a small one, and since he could feel the strain in his muscles, Ash was sure she could too. Thankfully, he could see a landing not far from them, leading to a stone tunnel that wove around the temple to where Marcus was standing.

"Almost there," Ash grunted, picking up his speed a bit. Misty said nothing, but grasped onto the rocky wall when they finally got to solid ground. They stood there for a moment, catching their breath, before Misty looked at him and nodded her head. He turned and led the way down the hallway towards Marcus' menacing aura.

Riley taught him a lot about carefully looking at auras, how they could change and had different layers depending on not just the person, but the people that influenced him. Marcus' was a dimly-glowing red aura that sent shivers up the teenage boy's spine. There were no connections, nothing to make it seem even the least bit warm, and that was very unsettling.

They rounded the corner, and Ash's eyes landed on the man's form. He was standing at the edge of the ledge, holding the Jewel of Life in his hand with a creepily happy smirk on his face. Hearing their loud footsteps, Marcus looked up towards them, raising an eyebrow. "So, you didn't perish in the Silver Water."

"Give the Jewel of Life back to Arceus!" Ash snapped back at him, though a part of him knew it was futile. He still wanted to hope that maybe there was a little more brightness that was hidden beyond his dim aura.

"It's too late for that," Marcus answered calmly as he turned to face them, twisted excitement passing over his features. "Heatran, attack them!"

Ash and Misty both looked towards the ceiling just in time to see a blast of fire coming their way. They jumped in opposite directions, crashing into the stone walls on either side of the hallway. Pikachu leapt in front of them, his Thunder Shock slamming into Heatran and knocking it off the ceiling. That didn't stop the legendary pokemon for long though, as it stalked towards them.

Misty tossed a pokeball up into the air. "Marill, use Bubblebeam!" The aquatic mouse appeared and she instantly released a torrent of bubbles to counteract the second wave of flames. "Can you talk to it?"

"Keep it distracted!" Ash called back, and she nodded, waving her hand at Marill. The pokemon bounced on her tail, leaping high into the air and unleashing a powerful stream of water.

Ash ran towards legendary pokemon while it was preoccupied, letting his bare hands rest on the warm metal of its body and ignoring the water that splashed onto him. "Come on, you remember me from earlier. I'm here to help. To help Arceus. He's one of your creators, right?" Heatran's eyes looked towards him. "Come on, helps us." His hand moved across the pokemon's head before jerking back quickly. The band that was on it gave off such a negative energy, that the trainer was shocked he hadn't noticed it before.

"Pikachu!" Ash cried out to his pokemon. "Use Iron Tail on this! Hurry!" Pikachu moved a lot faster than expected, and the boy yelped as he had to yank his hand away quickly before the

electric-type hit him too. The pokemon realized what he had almost done and rubbed the back of his head sheepishly. It didn't matter though, because the strange band shattered and fell to the floor. Heatran relaxed almost instantly, and Marill's onslaught came to an end.

"How did you...no matter!" Marcus pointed at them. "I will not lose to you! I will save Michina! It will never become what it once was! We can finally have a world of our own! Arceus will perish!"

Heatran turned around, launching an attack at Marcus. Bronzong spun in front of his trainer, managing to deflect the fire, but not without some damage. Ash looked back at Pikachu, who shot forward without a word, understanding what he wanted. Pikachu let electricity surround him as he jumped into the air, slamming his body into the injured pokemon.

Then the ground started shaking beneath them. What started as a light tremor quickly became violent, knocking Ash, Misty and their pokemon off of their feet. The rock ceiling above them started to shatter, but Ria threw her paws into the air, creating a shield to bounce anything away from them.

Heatran wasn't so lucky. It jumped out of the way of the stones, but when colliding with the ground again, the ledge shattered underneath its feet and the pokemon went plummeting down.

Ash yelled with surprise, jerking forward to look over the edge. He sighed with relief when he saw that Heatran slammed into the stairs below, though it definitely looked hurt.

An angry yell from behind him startled the teenage boy. He jerked around just in time to see the light of a powerful psychic attack heading towards them. Ria bounded in front of him, once again throwing her paws into the air to shield them. The small pokemon was already tired from her implausible use of Psychic earlier, and her shield didn't stand a chance against Bronzong's own psychic powers. The shield shattered, and they all had to dodge out of the way from the blinding light that shot by them.

"I'm going to kill him," Misty growled angrily, clutching the staff in her hand. "I'm going to smash him over the head and throw him down that pit."

"Or we could not murder someone," Ash replied dryly. He ran over to Ria, picking up the exhausted pokemon. "Thank you, Ria." He took out her pokeball, knowing that she needed time to recuperate, and being out there wasn't going to help that at all. She didn't protest as she vanished back inside, about ready to pass out as it was.

"Misty!" They both looked across the temple to the source of the barely discernible yell. Dawn was waving at them wildly, her face pale and her expression urgent. "We need your help!"

Misty inhaled sharply and looked around him him, her sea green eyes searching as her hand curled around the staff tightly. "I'll need to run by Marcus to get over to her from here."

Ash looked up and saw that she was right. The other paths would take far too long to get to, but up and around seemed plausible enough. The boy pressed his lips together in a thin line before he turned to get again, reaching out and holding onto the staff just above her hand. "I'll cover you."

A very small smile graced her lips. Looking back around to Dawn, she held up a finger, indicating that she'd be a minute. Her other hand fell away from the staff and the redhead stared at him seriously. "If you die, I'll kill you."

Ash opened his mouth but stopped himself before he could actually say anything, just staring at her oddly. He slowly nodded his head, and that seemingly appeased her. Apparently girls were weird

even in times of crisis. "Lets go."

Without needing to discuss anything else, Ash, Misty, Pikachu and Marill ran around the precariously thrown rubble. Marcus and his Bronzong were waiting for them, and he immediately tried to order his pokemon to attack, but Pikachu launched himself into the air, slamming his glowing tail into Bronzong's metal body. Ash himself wasn't exactly subtle either, jumping towards the Jewel of Life.

Out of the corner of his eye, Ash saw Misty and Marill run around them, disappearing down the hall that would lead her to Dawn. Once he was sure that she was okay, he turned all of his attention onto Marcus. For someone who was rather skeletal looking, the man was surprisingly strong, able to hold his own in their physical struggle.

An explosion from Pikachu and Bronzong's attacks colliding sent both of them spiraling to the floor. Marcus slammed his elbow into Ash's rib cage, and the boy cried out in pain, his arms instinctively letting go of the man to wrap around his abdomen.

Looming over him and using his free hand, Marcus grabbed onto Ash's throat tightly and squeezed. "You're no adult. You're just a simple, stupid child. This is what must happen to save our world. Don't you see?"

Ash gasped, one hand grabbing onto Marcus' to try and force it away, while a glowing orb appearing in the other. He slammed the Aura Sphere into the red-haired man's side without any hesitation.

Marcus howled in pain, his hand jerking away from Ash's throat. The teenager quickly rolled away, coughing and holding his throbbing neck. The side of Marcus' clothes were burned, blood seeping through the fabric. Despite everything the man had done, knowing that he had actually injured someone in that way made the trainer feel sick. Even now, he didn't want to hurt anyone.

Marcus jerked forward without warning, raising the Jewel of Life into the air and bringing it down towards Ash's head. He threw his hand up to block the strike, and when the orb slammed into the Aura Shield, the resulting shock wave not only shattered the barrier, but it threw both him and Marcus back in opposite directions. Marcus slammed into the wall, while Ash rolled off the side of the stone ledge and started falling down the massive chasm below.

...

Misty had no time to yell at Ash for being an idiot by just attacking Marcus. She would be sure to do it later, but for now, she focused on the task at hand. She ran as quickly as she could, stumbling and sliding over the broken ground. Despite her rotund appearance, Marill was a fairly quick pokemon and was able to keep up with her the entire way.

"Misty!" Dawn cried out in relief when she and Marill finally got close to her. She stumbled over to them, grabbing onto the older girl's bright red jacket. "We need your help! We're trying to stop the Silver Water and they sent me to get you and I'm pretty sure that earthquake was caused by Brock and we need to go now!" She turned to start running up the stairs behind her without another word. Misty internally groaned at the sight of more stairs, but ran after the blue-haired girl anyway.

The hallway right outside of the room was in complete shambles, and they had to carefully climb over the shattered stone. Inside of the room was no better than outside. Sudowoodo, Croagunk, Electivire, and Umbreon were doing a lot of damage.

Misty couldn't help but feel annoyed with them as she ran down the cracked stairs. They didn't look

like they needed her help, but she had little doubt that Ash had probably done something ridiculously stupid, now that she wasn't there.

Gary looked around at them, green eyes going wide. "There you are! We need your help to stop the metal from flowing. We thought it was just coming from here, but it looks like it's being funneled in from somewhere else too."

"We just need to stop it and break this apart. Your pokemon might be able to harden it again," Brock explained as his pokemon worked at creating a tunnel. "We're going to try to reroute it as best as we can for now!"

"We need you to start trying to clog it up that way." Gary pointed to the other side of the room.

Misty didn't ask any more questions, she went to work releasing the water pokemon that she could. She looked beside her at Dawn as Piplup ran up along her own, Buneary and Mamoswine appeared. The younger girl nodded her head and yelled, "Buneary, Mamoswine, use Ice Beam! Piplup, Bubblebeam!"

"Politoed, Starmie, use Hydro Pump! Marill, use Water Gun! Spheal, Ice Beam!" Misty yelled to the four pokemon that she unleashed. She put her hands up over her face before the water could hit the molten metal, stepping in front of Dawn. Steam blasted in all directions, hissing and instantly making it impossible to see.

...

When he pitched off the side of the stone landing, his hand unable to grasp anything to keep him from falling, Ash was sure that he was actually going to die. It wouldn't even be from the landing that would surely crush him anyway, but from the torrents of Silver Water that was still pouring down onto Arceus.

Barely a split second after falling over the ledge though, he came to an abrupt stop as someone grabbed his arm. Opening his eyes and looking up, Ash met Damos' bright blue eyes and relief washed over him. The much stronger man grunted, tugging the younger one back up onto solid ground.

"Pikapi!" Pikachu cried out in relief, running over to him and nuzzling his face into Ash's shirt. Bronzong was knocked out on the ground, but that came as absolutely no surprise to the teenager.

Once Damos was sure that Ash was alright, he quickly stood up and stormed towards Marcus. Ash watched him go, noticing that his cuffs were still locked onto his wrists so the man couldn't use Aura, but that didn't stop him from picking the red-haired man up by his thick robes and shaking him. "Where is the Jewel of Life? Call the pokemon off!"

"Never."

Ash blinked, ignoring the exchange and looking around wildly, realizing that Marcus must have lost the orb in the same burst of power that sent him flying moments before. Just like when he tried to find the Jewel of Life back in his time, it felt like it was everywhere all at once.

Almost. This time it was a little different. Maybe it was because he made contact with it, Ash didn't know, but there was a small little spot where the light seemed to originate from. Jumping to his feet, Ash ran, grabbing the staff that he had dropped somewhere along the lines without realizing it. The brightly glowing orb was teetering precariously on the edge of a drain pipe, just about to fall in before he grabbed it.

Ash's first reaction was to let go of the Jewel of Life. The rush of power that fell over him from just touching it was almost unbearable. He managed to hold on though, slamming it back into the holder on the staff and closing it. The light and the power diminished a bit, and he could breathe easily again.

"Ash!" He looked up at Damos, who was struggling with Marcus, their fight becoming a physical one. "Take the Jewel to Arceus! We need to fix my mistakes!"

The trainer nodded his head and started bounding down the stairs, when the entire temple shook violently again. Ash fell, rolling down enough stairs to leave a series of bruises that would no doubt hurt like hell when this was over. The staff was flung from his hand, landing at the edge and just barely balancing on it, teetering dangerously.

A wall on the opposite side of the room shattered, even more Silver Water pouring down onto Arceus below. The pokemon in question wasn't crying out in pain anymore, but combined with the constant electricity, his agony was becoming palpable.

Ash's hand shot out to focus himself, and though it was hard because Arceus was so far down, he managed to seek out the pokemon, feeling where he ended and the molten metal began. He forced his Aura between the two, pushing to get it off of Arceus just a bit.

A sharp crack echoed through the air and the raven-haired boy looked back up towards where Damos and Marcus were fighting. The entire landing shook and the base below them started crumbling away. Realizing what was about to happen when the two men didn't, Ash's other hand shot out, and he used his Aura to stop it from breaking away beneath Damos' feet.

Ash grunted with instant exertion. Focusing on Arceus had been hard enough, but focusing on two different things that were both far enough away to make it difficult as it was, was physically painful.

"Pika!" Not realizing that he closed his eyes due to the strain, Ash opened them again. He felt like his heart stopped as Pikachu darted forward, trying to grab onto the staff, but his best friend was too late. It tipped over the ledge, and all he could do was watch as it, and the Jewel of Life inside, fell down into the remaining water below.

...

"I think we almost got it!" Brock called out from across the room. Dawn waved at him in acknowledgment but she didn't say anything else, too focused on what her pokemon were doing.

The steam was easily the hardest part of their task. Their pokemon could only do so much before they'd have to stop for their trainers, and that would just put them back as the metal re-melted the solid stuff again. It was incredibly frustrating.

A shiny object caught her eye, and she leaned forward a bit, staring suspiciously. "What's that?"

"What's wha...oh Mew." Misty took a few steps back, her hand going over her lips in shock. "Oh Mew, they wouldn't have."

Dawn looked back to see the other girl going pale, her eyes wide and horrified. "Misty?

"What?" She snapped out of her stunned state, shaking her head. "Sorry I was just...remembering something else. I think..." The redhead hesitated for a moment, searching Dawn to see if she could handle the truth. Sighing, Misty said, "I think this metal might be made out of pokemon."

Dawn jerked back violently, backing right up into her. Misty grabbed a hold of the younger girl, holding onto her as her small body shook in horror. "No! Someone wouldn't do that! That's impossible!"

"I wish it was." Misty replied grimly, having seen this type of thing before, in their own time.

Their pokemon stopped their attacks, looking at their trainers sadly as they tried to gather their strength back. Neither girl had to ask to know that all of the pokemon knew what it was all along.

"What are you guys doing?" Gary called out to them. "Don't stop!" There was a panic to his voice that made them both look over at him.

Before either of them could ask why, the molten metal finally manage to eat its' way through the solid metal that they froze, bursting out and surging forward violently. Gary spun around and yelled, "Brock, wait!" He was too little, too late as Sudowoodo finally broke open the wall that they had been trying to tear apart. The pokemon managed to get out of the way, but the Silver Water surged out the hole.

Dawn didn't understand Gary's panic. She thought this was his plan, what he wanted. The teenage boy looked terrified though. He rushed forward, ignoring the heat that was radiating off the metal and leaning over to look down the hole, his Electivire stopping him from falling forward.

"What's wrong?" Brock called out to him, alarmed.

Gary looked at them all with horror. "I measured it too far. We just made it worse."

"Made it—." Misty's question was cut off as the ground started shaking violently beneath them. The walls started cracking and a massive chunk of the ceiling fell down, nearly crushing them.

"We need to leave!" Brock decided. Gary looked like he was about to argue, but the young man shook his head. "We're going to die if we stay here. We need to go." He was right, they all knew that he was right. None of them wanted to admit defeat, but they had no choice.

Calling back their pokemon, they abandoned the room, letting the Silver Water wash down with more force than before.

...

The electricity stopped, and Ash was immensely grateful for that. It only made the situation much worse than it was. He didn't know whether the pokemon were just exhausted, or if they had run to avoid the temple's destruction, but that didn't particularly matter. They were gone and it was making his life slightly easier.

Ash gasped as he fell to his knees, needing to hold out his arms in opposite directions to focus his Aura, but in doing so his muscles began to burn and shake in protest. He had no idea how long he could keep the molten metal from surrounding Arceus and keep the ground under Damos from falling.

Ria had appeared from her pokeball moments before, determined to help him. It helped for a while, but she was already so exhausted that the small pokemon couldn't last for long, slumping down beside him before vanishing into her pokeball once again. Instantly, the boy felt like there was more weight pushed onto him. He closed his eyes and groaned as his arms twitched, a headache beginning to pound against his skull.

"Pikapi." Ash opened his eyes, staring directly into Pikachu's dark brown ones. Pikachu reached

forward, putting a hand on his knee and shaking his head. "Pi pikapi pikachu pi pika chu." His ears pressed against his head in distress.

Blinking his bright brown eyes, Ash looked down at Arceus and then up at Damos, a sick feeling settling in the depths of his stomach. He stopped breathing for a moment, his heart pounding wildly as he realized exactly what Pikachu meant. Maybe the little electric-type didn't have Aura, but he was smart even by normal Pikachu standards, able to see what he couldn't sometimes.

He blinked wildly, trying to force back the tears that threatened to escape. He strained to keep a sob down his throat. Arms shuddering and going numb, he looked again at Damos, watching the man fight with Marcus. The man had a young family waiting for him. He had an entire city to properly take care of, a world to protect and a legacy to change.

Then again, was he even supposed to be able to change that? Was Damos allowed to be more than the one who betrayed Arceus?

Ash looked down at Arceus, and suddenly he saw Mewtwo. Mewtwo who was created by people and had no place in the world, lashing out at others because there was no one there to guide him. Lugia struggling to keep the three legendary birds in line. He thought about all of the other legendary pokemon, and all the other ones, that they helped, from holding Celebi in his arms as the pokemon died, to the Lucario that mostly moved onto another life. Then he thought about Shaymin. She once explained away her attitude towards him as she was pretty sure that her father said he was supposed to help her, but he had been gone a long time.

Then everything made sense. Everything that had happened was a chain reaction from this moment. The legendary pokemon, the world, fell into chaos, without Arceus, and though he, the Chosen One, was there, there was only so much he could do. If that was what could happen when Arceus left for a few thousand years, Ash didn't even want to think about what would happen if the pokemon died.

He closed his eyes and inhaled deeply. Letting go of the breath, he turned to Damos one last time. The man looked up from where he was fighting with Marcus, maybe able to sense something even if he still had the cuffs that blocked in Aura on. They never got to talk about what it meant to be a Chosen One, but they didn't need to.

Ash understood now.

Apologetic brown met bright blue, and the hope that was there almost crushed him. The teenager slowly got to his feet straining even more as he started to move to the edge of the stairs, farther away from Damos. His Aura was stretching thin, and the man seemed to realize this, shock replacing the hope.

"I'm sorry." Ash knew that there was no way the other Chosen One could hear him, but from the emotions radiating from him, he knew what the teenager was about to do. There was shock. There was fear. There was accusation and betrayal.

Then Ash lowered his hand and let go. He turned away, running as quickly as he could to Arceus in hopes of ignoring the thunderous roar of the stone floors being destroyed. He was focusing on the pokemon, trying to use everything he had to get the silver off of him, but he could still feel Marcus and Damos both fall, and then, without any sort of warning, their life forces were abruptly just gone. Ash cringed and actually gagged at the feeling but he kept going. He made his choice, and now he had to see it through.

Chapter End Notes

UPDATE: This is the edited version!! There was just a little miscommunication (aka ff.n not sending CLAVUS a notification that I sent her the chapter. Rude ff.n. Rude.) and now we're all good!

It's looking like this story IS going to be shorter than Distortion, but I'm not sure by how much yet. It seems like we're getting to the end, but lets just say I have a few more things planned! Being cruel to my favourite characters just happens to be one of those things!

One thing about this chapter to keep in mind is what I said in the summary for this fic, there's more than just right and wrong in the world, and this happened to be one of those times that Ash was forced to realize that.

Hope you guys enjoyed this chapter!

Written by: Skylight Sparkle

Edited, rather lately, by: CLAVUS (Sorry about that!)

The Harbinger of Life

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The stairs were a steep, crumbled mess covered in hardening metal. The trainer from Pallet Town already knew that touching the Silver Water would be a horrible idea. But seeing chunks of a Magnemite that apparently hadn't melted down all the way had Ash stopping his mad dash down the stairs. His concentration on Arceus slipped as he lurched towards the wall and expelled the meager contents of his stomach.

Ash gasped raggedly as he tried to breathe, holding onto the stone wall so tightly that it was scraping the skin of his fingers. His gasps turned into muffled sobs as he squeezed his eyes shut.

"Pikapi." Pikachu's tiny paw landed on his hand, and Ash looked down at him. Though his Aura gave him a really strong bond with Ria, Pikachu would always be his best friend, his partner, the single pokemon that understood him the most. Pikachu looked down towards where Arceus was and then back at Ash with such determination that the boy managed to pick himself up off of the ground. He took a deep breath and then nodded his head at his friend, moving over to the edge of the stairs. His eyes locked onto the wooden beams that spiraled down the inside of the ledge, most of them completely intact compared to the stairs.

Ash focused on Arceus once again, pushing the Silver Water back. He took a deep breath, and jumped down onto one of the planks, catching his balance and then jumping to the next one. Pikachu followed behind him as they jumped down from one beam to the next before finding a wooden landing that shook dangerously under their feet.

...

The destruction on the inside of the temple was horrifying. Brock recoiled from the destruction, knowing that the many Earthquake attacks he had Sudowoodo use contributed a lot of to it.

"Where's Ash?" Misty jumped from stone to stone, looking around for the boy with desperation in her eyes. The landing that she left him on was completely destroyed.

"There!" Dawn pointed downwards, and the four of them leaned forward to see Ash and Pikachu jumping down towards the bottom of the temple. Marcus and Damos were gone, as were all the pokemon that had been shocking Arceus. "But, where's the staff? And the Jewel of Life?"

Gary looked up towards the gushing Silver Water, and went to slam his fist into the rock wall with frustration, when he realized something horrifying. He could see through his hand. "What the -?" A quick look around made him realize that everyone was slowly starting to fade out. "We're disappearing."

Misty, Brock and Dawn all looked down at themselves. "What's happening?" Dawn cried out with alarm.

"Arceus is dying," Gary spoke up when no one else would. "Arceus is dying, and that's changing the future. A future where we don't exist."

...

Ash hadn't exactly interacted with a lot of dying creatures before. Sure, occasionally it was

something he felt at a Pokemon Center or when they were camping in the forest, because it was a natural part of life, but it wasn't really a common occurrence around him. Even so, there was something that he noticed. Unless it happened really abruptly, a creature's aura tended to almost lash out, like they were using every last bit of energy they had to fight off death, only for it to fade away. Feeling them fade away always made him terribly upset, but the quickness was really disturbing to him, a light blinking out of existent without warning.

That was how he knew that Arceus was dying. The raven-haired boy skidded down the stone tunnels, sweat dripping down the side of his face from the combination of precariously jumping from wooden beam to wooden beam to get down there, the exertion of using his Aura, and the heat from the Silver Water.

Ash fell in the last couple feel, rolling down the stones and landing with a thump but never once letting his barrier waiver. He groaned, pushing himself back to his feet and stumbled towards Arceus, who was just sitting there, his eyes glowing a vicious red.

"Pikapi!"

Ash looked around at Pikachu's cry of alarm, jerking back when he saw that his friend was actually disappearing before his eyes. Looking down at himself, he saw the same thing starting to happen.

The boy fell to his knees, staring as Arceus' body was almost completely engulfed by the Silver Water as the molten metal finally came to an end, the last vicious drops raining down onto them. All the while, he was still focusing his Aura to try and keep it off of him.

"Arceus," he muttered, closing his eyes and breathing deeply, finding it a little easier to actually use his Aura as his body faded away. It was just energy, after all, and even if he wasn't here, it wouldn't just fade away, it would just change. "I can't give you the Jewel of Life. I don't have it. But I will. I'll find it for you when you come back. I swear. I'll be there!"

He felt it. It was fleeting, but it was still there. The sudden response of golden light interacting with his own Aura. He focused even more. "I know you don't believe in us anymore, that you're hurt and that's why you're not fighting, but you need to fight. You can be angry, you can hate us, but you can't leave. The pokemon need you. The world needs you. Please." The boy shook his head. "You can use my Aura, everything I've got if you need to. I won't... I won't let you down."

Arceus responded to him. He responded by his own Aura lasting out, mingling with Ash's as the boy once again became completely solid. The feeling of Arceus' power working with his own was almost overwhelming, even more so than holding the Jewel of Life had been. The parts of Arceus that Ash could still see started to glow, and beside him, Pikachu became solid again.

The bright golden glow became almost too intense, but instead of looking away, Ash reached out, using the light like it was his own Aura, and he pushed.

The liquid metal exploded in all directions, freezing almost instantaneously and creating almost what looked like a strange, metal sculpture. Arceus, bruised, burned and bloody, rose up out of the hole that was created shuddering to breathe. Still, the pokemon managed to open his eyes and looked directly at Ash. "You..."

Ash shook his head. "I'll find it." He wouldn't do it because it was his destiny as the Chosen One or anything like that. He'd find it because he chose to, because it was the right thing to do. "I promise. Go."

"What is your name?" The words came out like painful gasps.

"Ash." He watched as Arceus slowly nodded his head, closing his eyes.

"I will look for you. Know that." Arceus rose up into the air. "Thus the earth will turn to Ash."

The boy jerked back with surprise, recognizing those exact words from the Shamouti Island prophecy that would forever be seared into his mind. He watched as Arceus flew to the sky, away from the destruction and horror that surrounded him.

Pikachu cried out in alarm when it looked like he fell forward, still kneeling with his forearms to hold him up as he breathed in and out harshly. The ground started to shake beneath them, cracking loudly before completely giving out. Instead of falling, Ash felt himself being jerked up into the air, Pikachu getting dragged along with him. The whole world seemed to spin around him before everything went black.

...

At first everything was black. There wasn't a single sound, not even the rapid beating of her heart or her gasping breaths. It was like nothing existed at all, except for her. She could think, therefore she had to exist, but anything beyond that was up for debate.

Sensations were the first thing to come back. The feeling of being lurched forward at an uncomfortably fast pace. She could feel her heart pounding in her chest, she could feel the sting of tears in her eyes that she desperately tried to hide. The area around her began to shimmer and ripple with blue and green lights and stars of every possible hue between the two colours. Stars danced at the edge of her vision and it looked like faint images were rushing by her too quickly for her to even guess what they were. She could see her friends though, and while it was relieving, it was also terrifying.

Brock was covered with dust and grime, small scratches and bruises dotting his dark skin. He was standing ragged and rigid. Gary's shoulders were slump forward, and she had never seen Professor Oak's grandson look quite so defeated before as he did in that moment, scowling to himself with dirt and the occasional burn mark on his grey coat. Misty's hair was falling out from her ponytail, scrapes and cuts on her skin and rips in her jacket. Her cheeks were bright red from the steam that had hit them earlier. Dawn could only imagine what she looked like.

The second that they were able to move again, Misty lurched to the side, moving around Brock and skidding to the ground. Dawn leaned forward, confused until she saw the redhead kneeling in front of Ash. He was bruised and exhausted, but what really caught Dawn's attention was the fact that it looked like he was trying as hard as he could not to cry. She didn't know what she expected from the two now that the danger was over, maybe more fighting or for Ash to pull away from Misty, but instead he just practically collapsed forward and hugged his girlfriend tightly.

Everything around them jerked to a stop, and they were all flung forward, slamming into cold piles of snow, the frigid air biting at their exposed skin. Everything was still for a moment as all five of them just laid in the snow.

The explosion that echoed through the air made them all jerk up quickly, reminding them that, though they had all just seen Arceus escape, that was in a different time, a different place.

"We're back," Dawn gasped out, staring in horror as Arceus' fury reigned down on the ruins and the town below. It looked so different from the world of the past. "What do we do now?"

Ash took a few steps forward, away from Misty, and knelt on the ground again. Using his bruised, bare hand, he brushed the snow away and pressed his palm flat against the ground, closing his eyes

and exhaled, his breath curling up in front of him in the cold air.

Gary opened his mouth, no doubt to ask what the hell he was doing, but Brock just shook his head. The brunet decided to stay quiet, watching his childhood friend curiously instead.

Ash's eyes snapped open and he jerked up into a standing position. "Of course they have it." He let out a quick laugh and shook his head, turning to the others. "Go check on Sheena and Kevin. I'm going to go get the Jewel of Life."

"What?" All four of them asked at the same time.

"You know where it is?" Gary toned in over everyone else. "I thought you couldn't pinpoint it."

"I couldn't before I got close to it," Ash turned and started sliding down the steep slopes of ice and rock, Pikachu going down behind him. He started jumping from ledge to ledge, surprisingly not stumbling over the ice.

"I know he's using his Aura to stop from falling," Misty mumbled as she turned and started to walk away, "but I'm still going to kill him."

"Where are you going?" Dawn called out to her, though she quickly started following the older girl.

"To find Sheena and Kevin before Arceus rips this place apart!"

Brock watched the two girls go before looking back towards Gary, who was staring at Ash as the boy quickly descended the side of the steep hills. "We can't always follow him where he has to go." Gary looked up at him with surprise. "So we do what we can, how we can, and keep going our own way." He motioned towards where the girls ran off, and Gary slowly nodded his head, viridian eyes quickly looking down at Ash again before he started walking, trying not to think about his friend below.

...

At some point of time, Pikachu jumped onto Ash's shoulder, and it was probably for the best since that meant he only had to focus on not letting himself fall. Aura might have prevented him from losing his balance and plummeting to the ground, but it did nothing to help against the cold. His bare hands, bruised and pale, were so cold that he couldn't really feel them anymore. His lungs burned as his breath came out in short gasps. His head bounded like someone was drumming against it non-stop.

None of those things mattered though. What mattered was jumping from one steep ledge to the next to get down an impossible cliff side.

Finally hitting the ground, Ash took a second to breath deeply. He looked up as a shadow fell over him, watching Giratina shoot across the sky towards Arceus. Prompted to run, he managed to get two steps across the snow-topped grass and ended up slipping. He yelped as he landed on the ground and slid down the snowy ridge, stopping just before he would have plummeted into the water.

Groaning, Ash pushed himself up, looking back at Pikachu, who was shaking the snow off of his fur. The pokemon quickly jumped back up onto his shoulder, a sign that he was okay, and the boy started running again, careful not to let himself fall. They were very close, and it was a lot easier to focus on their familiar auras rather than the blinding Jewel of Life.

He paused at the edge of a cavern, staring with surprise because though the area around it was a bit

different, it was the same one that gave him and Misty access to the temple in the past. Ash knew he had limited time, but he couldn't stop himself from wondering what the odds of that were.

Shaking his head, he ran inside, falling to the ground as something was slammed into the cliffs above him, a massive boulder crashed into where he had been moments before. He turned, breathing heavily, and getting to his feet. Ash couldn't run back outside, so there was really only one place to go: forward.

...

If she never saw another set of stairs after this, it would be far too soon. Misty ran up the haphazardly shattered stones, into the smoking remains of the ruins. Despite the fact that Arceus was attacking viciously, she still came to a sudden stop, her bright orange bangs falling into her sea-green eyes. Just hours before, they'd been thousands of years in the past to when this place was new, and after standing the test of time, it was crumbling before her very eyes. She wasn't a history buff or anything, but that was still incredibly sad.

She looked around quickly as Giratina shot by, causing the wind to tare at her clothes, engaging Arceus again. Palkia darted around them to join in the quarry, and Dialga laid on the ground, the only signs of life being his slowly rising and falling stomach. Misty, Dawn and Brock had seen all three of these behemoths in action before, and it was chilling to see all three of them being defeated by a single force.

A single force that didn't even have all of the powers it was supposed to.

"There!" Brock called out suddenly, and Misty looked around, quickly following him as he started to run. The blond woman was kneeling beside a fallen pillar, her hair falling out of the buns on her head, rips and tears in her jacket. "Sheena!"

At Brock's yell, she looked up, her bright blue eyes welling with tears. She gasped a bit before yelling, "Help me!"

Misty heard Dawn let out a shuddering breath behind her when they saw what Sheena needed help with. Kevin was pinned under the pillar, though it didn't actually seem to be pressing down onto him, just trapping him.

"I'm sorry we didn't listen!" Sheena almost sobbed, her eyes wide and filled with tears. "That the Jewel was a fake. I'm sorry! Please help me get him out!"

Gary moved forward first, putting a hand on the pillar and pressing his lips together into a straight line. "If we shift it just a couple feet that way," he nodded his head, "then he should be able to get out. It's going to be heavy though."

"Good thing we're a team!" Dawn exclaimed, tossing a pokeball up into the air to reveal Mamoswine. "We'll just work together!"

Likewise, Brock release Sudowoodo and Happiny. "I'm in."

"Right. We just need to—." Gary was cut off as Giratina was thrown into the cliffs, shaking everything violently. The pillar shifting a little bit more, but Mamoswine managed to stop it from moving too much. His viridian eyes snapped towards Arceus and the boy growled, "If he keeps this up, we'll never get him out."

"Palkia's still up there," Misty said, releasing her own pokemon. "Lets just move fast."

"No, wait," Gary knelt down, looking at the bottom of the pillar. "It's starting to crack. If we push it too fast, it could roll back onto him, but if we push it too slow it's probably just going to break off and crush anything under it anyway."

"So tell us what to do," Dawn insisted.

Gary looked up at them with unsure eyes, and Misty couldn't remember a time when she had seen him look so conflicted. It was true, she didn't interact with him very much, but he always seemed so confident in himself.

"Yeah." He stood up and released Electivire. "Line all the pokemon up here, and start pushing slowly so we can see how it'll hold up." He took a deep breath and muttered, "I hope I'm not wrong this time."

The pokemon all did as he said, and carefully started to push the pillar.

...

If someone were to ask Ash exactly what was the single most useful advantage of being able to manipulate Aura, it wouldn't be the shields or the spheres. It wouldn't even be the fact that he could make himself jump farther or off of higher ledges without hurting himself. No, what he found most helpful was the fact that there was Aura pulsing through absolutely everything that was living, even veins of it traveling through the earth.

In the pitch black cavern that he was running through, he jumped over a large rock without actually seeing it. He couldn't necessarily see in the dark, it was more like he could see the pale, glowing outlines of the jutting stones.

He breathed out as they drew closest to the distinct auras that belonged to Jessie, James and Meowth. Team Rocket was such an (unwanted) presence in his life that he could easily distinguish them as much as he could his friends.

Not to mention the teenager was pretty sure that he'd recognize their voices anywhere.

"What do we do with it now?"

"Give it to the boss, of course!"

"If you think we're getting it by the crank outside, you're wrong! We're going to be trapped down here forever!"

Coming to a stop, Ash slowly peered around the corner, realizing that he could actually see thanks to a faint, green glow. His breath hitched when he realized the light was coming from the Jewel of Life, no doubt the topic of their conversation.

The cave lightly shaking around them was enough to make them stop arguing, and prompt Ash to reveal himself. He moved around the corner, startling James enough to make the man yelp. "I need that."

"Where'd you come from?" Meowth demanded, standing up straight and glaring at him.

Jessie, on the other hand, held the staff that housed the Jewel of Life closer. "Oh no, Twerp, you're not getting your hands on this! It's our ticket to the top." The ground shook below their feet, startling them all a bit.

"The top of where?" Ash snapped, feeling his frayed nerves starting to get the best of him. "Do you think any of us are gonna survive if Arceus doesn't get that back?" He shook his head, hands shaking as they clenched into fists at his side. He squeezed his eyes shut and gritted his teeth. "Either you give me the Jewel of Life and I'll help you get out of here, or I'm just going to take it, even if it means leaving you trapped." His eyes snapped open again, and the teenage boy pleaded, "Don't make me have to choose."

James' face softened visibly, Jessie seemed confused, and Meowth was suspicious. Jessie suddenly took a step forward and opened her mouth to talk when the cavern shook violently as part of the rock ceiling exploded inwards. Team Rocket screamed, while Ash threw his hands up into the air instinctively.

The collision of the massive boulder with the Aura Shield sent a wave of pain through Ash's arms, and his legs buckled slightly as he struggled to keep it from crushing them. "Run!" He looked over his shoulder at a shell-shocked Team Rocket, slowly backing up in their direction. "Keep going down that tunnel."

"It's a dead end!"

"Just go!"

They scurried away, and Ash made sure that Pikachu was out of the way before he moved too, letting the shield fall at the last second. The pile of rocks slammed into the ground, shaking the land under their feet, but everyone managed to keep upright this time. Then they ran until they reached a wall of rocks that was blocking off the rest of the tunnel.

"Since when can you do that?" Jessie asked, her voice raising an octave.

The teenager ignored her, clenching his hands together in front of him and closing his eyes, almost like he was praying. It was a trick Riley taught him, to focus his power when he wanted to build it up. He opened his eyes and pulled his hands away from each other, a brightly glowing Aura Sphere appearing. Looking towards the rock wall, he said, "Cover your faces." He pulled his arms back and then pushed them forward, the Aura Sphere flying into the rocks. Shards and sand flew in different directions, but the wall crumbled to the ground, revealing an opening only a few meters down the tunnel.

"Well, that's definitely handy," James said weakly.

Ash looked around at them again and held his hand out. "I need the staff."

Meowth and James looked up at Jessie, who pressed her lips together, brow furrowing. Slowly, the woman took a few steps forward and held it out to him. "Take it and go."

Ash was quick to take it from her hands, opening the top once again just to make sure that the sphere was still there. He nodded at them gratefully and said, "Thank you." He nodded at Pikachu, who gave him a thumbs up, and then turned to run.

Pikachu followed him a few steps, but stopped briefly, turning around to wave at Team Rocket before scurrying after his trainer.

"Should we tell the boss about that?" Meowth wondered, ears twitching slightly as he watched Ash run towards a questionable ledge and start climbing up.

James looked uncomfortable, shifting slightly and jumping a bit when Jessie said, "No." He stared at her with surprise, but she didn't pay attention to him, staring up at the retreating boy instead.

"No. People get lost chasing legends without someone like us after them."

...

Palkia hit the ground with a shuddering crash, and Gary inhaled sharply. He quickly threw himself to the ground, looking at the pillar and grimacing when he saw that the cracks were becoming bigger. There wasn't a big enough gap for Kevin to climb out yet, and if it broke apart, there was no way the young man would survive. The brunet just hoped that he was making the right call this time.

"Arceus, please stop!" Sheena pleaded as the pokemon loomed over them. She held her hands together and tried to focus, but was quickly thrown back. Luckily, Brock managed to catch her. "His rage is too intense."

"Wait!" Misty yelled suddenly, startling everyone. She ran forward, ignoring Dawn as the younger girl tried to stop her. "You need to stop this! I'm sorry we attacked you back there but we didn't know! We didn't realize what happened!"

Gary had no idea what she was talking about, until something clicked in his brain. Though Arceus hadn't actually seem them earlier, they still did attack him with water and electricity. Knowing exactly what happened to him thousands of years before instantly made Gary regret what they had done.

Much to everyone's surprise, where Arceus just shrugged off Sheena's attempts to talk, he actually stopped. He stared at Misty with critical eyes, like he was trying to see into the deepest parts of her soul. He tilted his head slightly and said, "I know you. You were there that day."

"I was," Misty nodded her head. "I tried to help. We all did."

"Where is he?"

"Damos?"

"No. The one who promised he'd be here."

"He'll be here soon!" Misty clearly had no idea what was going on, but it was easy to figure out that Arceus was referring to Ash. He must have said something to the pokemon before it left in the past. It wasn't an unfeasible idea, since Gary knew for a fact that Ash had been with Arceus.

The brunet jumped slightly as the pillar let out an ear-splitting crack beside them. He looked around with alarm and realized that it was breaking lose.

"No, he has betrayed me as well." Misty took a step back as a bright, golden orb blinding their vision. "There is no good left in this world!"

"Stop!" Ash ran up the set of dilapidated steps behind them, gracefully stumbling over some of the dislocated stones. He hurried around them all, running so that he was standing in front of Misty. The raven-haired boy took a few deep breaths and then looked up at Arceus, holding out a very familiar staff. "I promised I'd be here. I promised I'd find it for you again!" Hitting the button, the top opened to revealing the glowing orb inside. "Damos never meant to keep it. He tried so hard to get it back to you."

Arceus was silent, staring at him for a moment before the orb lifted into the air. A bright green glow started emanating from it as it almost expanded outwards before quickly contracting into a ball of vibrant light. The light twisted around itself before dividing into five separate elongated

hexagons, each with its own distinct feel as colours danced across their surfaces. They slowly moved towards Arceus, circling around his body and vanishing with a pale golden glow.

Everyone held their breath, staring in silence and waiting for something to happen.

An intense golden light started rippling across Arceus' body, quickly becoming far too bright to actually look at. Everyone else looked away or hid their faces, while Ash squinted, holding his arm above his face and feeling Misty bury her face into the back of his shoulder.

The last part startled him a bit, and he looked back at her for a moment before turning his attention back as a bright column of golden light shot into the sky. It hurt to look at, but it was amazing. It was like he could feel anything and everything from it all at once. As the light hit the sky, the dark clouds dispersed, vanishing to reveal a bright blue sky and a warm sun.

The light dimmed a bit, revealing Arceus himself once again, though his natural aura was slightly brighter than before. His red and green eyes looked directly at Ash, as he slowly and calmly glided towards him.

Misty's fingers curled tighter into the fabric of his jacket, but Ash took a step away from her. He looked back and shook his head before turning to face Arceus again.

Gary wanted to yell at Misty, to tell her to grab onto Ash again because he knew him and knew that something was going to happen. Without warning, a bright white light exploded from Arceus, temporarily blinding them all as it vanished.

The brunet groaned as he blinked his eyes over and over again, trying to get them to adjust so he could see again. His ears were working fine though, so he was able to hear Misty when she called Ash's name.

Forcing himself to look at where they had been moments ago, Gary felt his stomach drop when he realized what had happened. In that bright flash of light, not only had Arceus vanished, but so did Ash.

Chapter End Notes

So you know how I usually give you guys a bit of warning before I end a story? Well, you get one chapter warning this time, because the next one is the last one. I was just writing and it didn't really hit me until I typed the last sentence that it was over. That makes this my second shortest story, Distortion being the longest, but that's okay.

Now since I apparently scarred a lot of people for life last time, let me clarify some things. First off: I am a horrible person and I regret nothing. Secondly, a couple people pointed out that the 'Silver Water' was probably more along the lines of mercury, and I agree. It wasn't nearly nefarious enough for me though. It also left me wondering how they got THAT much mercury? Oh, and when Misty was referring to seeing something horrible like that before, she meant Dr. Young's lab in TMoM.

I won't lie, along with the scene where Ash and Gary were talking about their past, the scene where Ash had to pick between Arceus and Damos was one that I had planned

VERY early on. Like, when I was writing BTaS early. It was just something that stuck with me because, as the summary of this fic states, sometimes there is no good and evil. I mean, I make it clear that Marcus is a deranged bastard, but at the same time in HIS mind he was doing the right thing because he wanted to save Michina. After all, everyone's the protagonist of their own story. The idea of good and bad, light and dark, is very convoluted and sometimes there is no right or wrong answer.

A huge, huge thanks goes to CLAVUS, who takes time out of her busy schedule to battle with the monstrosities that I like to call chapters!

Til next time,

Written by: Skylight Sparkle

Edited by: CLAVUS

Ends and Beginnings

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Before he opened his eyes, Ash knew that he had gotten himself into another strange situation. He was laying on something very warm and very soft in a strange way, like it was there but not there at the same time. Slowly, he opened his bright brown eyes, the strange softness coming into sharp focus. He squinted with confusion, before realizing that it was fur.

He jerked up, looking around wildly when he realized that he was on Arceus' back. Sure, the boy wasn't unfamiliar with riding around on the backs of legendary pokemon, but this was a little bit different. If that wasn't strange enough, they were floating (at least, he assumed they were floating) in the middle of darkness. Everything was black in every direction Ash looked, even down.

"Where are we?"

"You wanted answers, did you not?" Arceus asked him, his voice calm and almost kind, like it had been when Ash saved him in the past. "About who you are?"

"Well, yeah," he slowly nodded, his body relaxing a bit as the boy realized that he wasn't actually in danger. "But I don't get where we are."

"It's a story that goes back much farther than you'd expect. Farther than you'll be able to understand. Back to the beginning," Arceus explained.

"To the beginning of what?"

"Everything."

Ash tilted his head slightly, and then jumped when an orb of light burst into existence, flying by them, or maybe they flew by it, he couldn't tell. More and more of the orbs kept appearing around them.

"The beginning, there was only me," Arceus said. "Everything you see, everything you don't see. Everything and nothing at the same time." Sensing the boy's confusion, Arceus chuckled. "I grew tired of my dual existence and in-existence, and I created something to give me purpose, something to erase the nothingness."

Ash watched an oblong sphere appear before them, made of white light that slowly turned into a solid, bright pink. Cracks formed along the surface, and the sphere exploded, revealing a small, pink creature with short fur, a long tail, and pale blue eyes. "Mew," he whispered in awe.

"Yes," Arceus nodded his head. "The first of everything. Mew. We lived in nothingness together, before I decided to create something different for both of us." Swirling trails of pale blue energy circled around them before violently colliding with one another. Ash covered his eyes from the light, and when he opened them, he could only gape in shock. Where before there was nothing, he could now see glittering stars in the distance, and before him was a stone structure, a very familiar one.

"The Tree of Beginning." He leaned over a bit to look at it more closely, but jerked back when something rushed by him. A very small Dialga and Palkia flew by, chasing the miniature Giratina around.

"Using the genetic material that I gave Mew, I created all the others. Time, Space, and the world to balance it all. Though many have come to believe Giratina is something evil, it is far from the truth. I gave each of them a duty as I created my world. I could have controlled all of those things on my own, but I wished to be a part of this world, and bestowed the responsibility to others. The land, the sea, the skies, life, death... all of it."

The rocks from the Tree of Beginning began to expand, water rushing up to meet it, fighting fiercely over where one area ended and the next began. The atmosphere surrounded it, to bind the two to a set place. Legendary pokemon began appearing one after another, and Ash realized that Arceus must have been giving him the very brief, dumbed down version of the story.

Still, he was watching the creation of their world.

"Life will find a way, if you let it," Arceus told him as they flew over the mountains, watching trees and plants form. "That is exactly what I chose to do." Lugia burst from the seas and flew in a circle, three glowing eggs appearing and hatching into a tiny Articuno, Zapdos and Moltres. Ho-oh flew down to the earth, and in her wake, Suicune, Raikou and Entei appeared.

"Soon, life began to slip away from me. They were all tangible, all alive, and I was alive but yet I was not, so I chose to create a form from the same Mew who was my first friend." Ash watched as light and clouds twisted in front of them, warping and changing until Arceus' massive figure hovered not far from them. "I was no longer needed in the capacity I was before. So I joined them and, knowing that I would never be able to truly claim my former existence." A glowing white orb appeared above the other Arceus, splitting into several coloured ones that flew off in different directions. "I knew that bad things could happen though, and I would be giving up my omnipotence, so I wouldn't be as aware of it. I knew that I could become the problem."

The other Arceus suddenly moved, and Mew appeared, flying around it excitedly. "That didn't matter, for I finally belonged."

Lightning suddenly flashed, and Ash looked up to see Dialga and Palkia fighting above them. A loud crash from below drew the boy's attention down, only to see Groudon and Kyogre clashing. "Then began the warring. Others thought that because I gave up my omnipotence that they could be the one to rule all. I settled those matters quickly, but realized that even I had acted in anger at those times."

Flashes of light, exploding mountains and sizzling seas appeared before them.

"That is when I decided that this world could not be for us alone. Such as I served them for so long to make their lives better, they should serve others. Mew was the one to step forward and make this new change, not I. Using but only the powers of her own mind and a small bit of her own existence, she created another Mew. This young one, who would become the guardian of the Tree of Beginning, helped her create more. These different Mew adapted on their own over time, changing to the surroundings. The pokemon you know today did not always exist. Only we legendaries are the same. All others, including humans, were created over time."

Strange pokemon dove through the waters, climbed up through the trees and soared through the skies. Ash watched them in awe before frowning slightly. "This is...amazing." That was really an understatement, but he wasn't quite sure what else he was supposed to say. "I don't understand what this has to do with me though. Well, I do, it has to do with everyone, but... you know what I mean."

Arceus chuckled. "I do know. Life is a beautiful thing, yet, time and time again we fought over the world, even myself. Sometimes, the world fought back against us. Not only did the world need protecting from us, but we needed protecting from each other. So I set forth a destiny, one in

which a creature would be chosen to be able to make a difference, to make the choices that we could not. This destiny found its way into humans, as you evolved over time from the same ancestors that psychic and fighting-types did."

"The Chosen One." Ash's shoulders slumped. "I was hoping Giratina was right but... I guess it was Shaymin and Darkrai that were. That's what I have to do. Help you guys no matter what. I don't have a choice in the matter."

"No." Arceus spoke so firmly, sounding almost insulted, that it startled him. "No. Communication and languages do not always stand the test of time. There is no true term in your language, or any language in existence today that truly describes the destiny I set forth. The simplest way is that you, and others before you, were given the ability to choose where our fates lie. Not in a sense where you can create things like I did, but in a sense where your choices make all the difference in the world."

There was a flash, and suddenly they were hovering over Michina Town. Ash inhaled sharply when he watched a younger Damos walk forward, holding out a hand to a younger Marcus.

"Damos was just like you. His choices, though not purposely hurtful, would have led to my death, for not trusting his instincts and choosing to let in the darkness without even meaning to. Your choices led to my survival." The raven-haired boy grimaced as he watched himself kneeling on the stairs, arms shaking. He looked away as the other version of him lowered his arm and the ground beneath Damos and Marcus broke apart. "Choices are not easy, but they are your own."

"Why me though? I'm not like Damos. I don't think..." Ash shook his head and looked down at his bruised, shaking hands. "I don't think I can make choices like that again. Why did you choose me?"

"I did not," Arceus said simply as he flew up towards the blue sky. "It is true, the destiny touched you even before you were born, but it does not matter. The closest I can describe for what you are is not a Chosen One, but rather the One Who Chooses. They can choose to act in a positive light, a negative light, stay neutral, or stay ignorant. The choices are not easy, and they are rarely ever kind. Your own fate is no different. If he had rejected it, there would have been nothing I could have done. Others have in the past. The one who chose you, was you."

Ash narrowed his eyes slightly and then shook his head. "I don't understand. So, this destiny was mine, it just happened to hit me, but what makes me the Chosen One..." He trailed off, not really sure where he was going with the thought.

"It's the choices you make and the life you lead. It's the friends who believe in you. Your life is yours to live, Ash Ketchum. For what makes you the Chosen One, is you." Arceus nodded his head, and Ash's eyes began to feel heavy.

"What happening?"

"To get from my realm to yours is too much for your consciousness, so for now, you must sleep." His head nodded a few times, and Ash leaned against Arceus' strange fur. As he slowly fell back asleep, he realized that this is what it must have been like to sleep on clouds if that was at all possible.

...

"Pull!" Gary's voice echoed through the air as the pokemon heaved the pillar upward. Sheena and Brock were quick to move, grabbing Kevin's arms to drag him out from underneath it, seconds before it cracked in half and fell on where he had been.

Misty wasn't paying any attention to that. Instead, she was sitting at the edge of the ruined temple, her legs dangling precariously over the edge. Pikachu sat beside her, ears twitching as he looked up to the orange sky as the sun started to set.

"Misty?" Dawn walked over to the other girl, squatting down beside her. "I'm sure he's fine. None of them seem worried." She nodded towards Giratina, Palkia and Dialga, all of whom were standing together, also staring at the sky. They were what gave them the idea to wait and watch, rather than panic, in the first place.

"They're also gods," the redhead grumbled a bit, rubbing her arms to generate more warmth.

The younger girl was about to speak again when Pikachu suddenly sat up straight. Both girls got up quickly, staring towards the sky with eager eyes as the three legendary pokemon that were with them suddenly started moving.

Another bright flash blinded them briefly, and by the time they could see, Arceus had already appeared in front of them, a certain trainer pushing himself into a sitting position on his back. Ash said something to Arceus that they couldn't hear, and then jumped off his back when they were close enough to the ground, stumbling slightly but still managing to stay up.

"Pikapi!" Pikachu launched himself up into his trainers arms, nuzzling his face into the boy's jacket.

"Hey," Ash laughed towards the girls, squeezing the pokemon tightly.

Misty cleared her throat, and mustered up the single most unimpressed look that she possibly could. "That's it? You vanish on us, and when you show up again, all you can say is 'hey'?"

"Not to mention you showed up riding around another legendary pokemon," Dawn added, folding her arms across her chest.

Ash smiled sheepishly at the two girls, a smile that didn't exactly meet his eyes. Still, he hugged Dawn, and then Misty, clinging to her tightly while Pikachu balanced on his shoulder.

"Where did you go?" Brock asked, face twisting with both worry and relief. Gary came up to them as well, staring at Ash curiously.

"Arceus wanted to tell me a few things," Ash looked down. "Some things about me that I've been wondering."

Though Brock, Dawn and Misty instantly understood what he meant, Gary was still going to vocalize the question. He barely got the chance to open his mouth when the ground beneath them started to glow.

They all jerked back in shock, watching a wave of light pass over the ground, recreating everything that had been destroyed. It even traveled up their legs, making all of the little cuts and bruises disappear. The buildings, the mountains, the trees and everything else rebuilt themselves before their very eyes. Many of the pokemon that had fled the area earlier began to return, all flocking towards where Arceus floated, watching the world below him.

"History cannot be changed," Arceus spoke suddenly, turning his head towards them. "Wounds can be healed though. I apologize for what I have done."

"No," Sheena shook her head, walking towards the edge of the temple. She fell to her knees before him. "No, we're the ones who need to apologize."

"For what your ancestors have done? A child cannot control the actions of their parents before they were born." Arceus turned to the three other legendary pokemon. "My children, I am sorry to you as well. You have all done wonderfully at keeping our world safe."

Soft coos that didn't seem to fit such large creatures echoed through the air as Dialga, Palkia and Giratina flew into the air, surrounding Arceus without an ounce of distrust in their bodies.

Sheena rose to her feet again, clasping a hand over her heart. Kevin walked up to her side, putting a hand on her shoulder. She sighed as she watched the grass begin to turn yellow, the leaves falling away from the trees. "We will pay for our sins either way."

"No, young one." Arceus shook his head. "Your home is not doomed. This is simply what is meant to happen in winter. It will flourish again, should you all treat the land properly. Work hard, and it will not fall into decay again. The Jewel of Life was meant to start you on a path this way, not to keep it as is."

"You mean, Marcus was worried about giving you back the Jewel of Life, but there was no need to worry?" Ash asked, frowning at the thought.

"That depends on everyone who lives here and uses the land. I will not be the one ensuring the survival of everything here anymore, but I know you will flourish."

"Life finds a way," the raven-haired boy muttered, earning a curious look from his girlfriend. He just smiled at her and shook his head.

"That, it does," Arceus agreed, having heard him despite how quietly he spoke. "And now I remember, that I too am a part of it."

Giratina moved first, flying down towards the water and creating a portal, flying through just before it froze over. Palkia and Dialga flew in opposite directions, vanishing into rips of pink and blue in the sky. Arceus nodded towards them all before turning and flying away from them. "There is so much to heal, but we will all do it together."

Gary stepped up beside Dawn, Brock beside Misty, and Ash between the two girls as they stared at the sky, a cool breeze gently blowing their hair and genuine smiles on their faces. Sheena and Kevin stood close to them, and the seven of them watched as Arceus vanished again.

Sheena took a deep breath, her shoulders slumping a bit as she turned to look at them. "I don't understand what happened, but thank you."

"I don't think we'd be able to really explain everything," Brock shook his head with a sigh.

"We were with Damos, in the past," Dawn spoke reluctantly.

As she launched into the story of what really happened, Ash dropped his hand to his side, frowning a bit when it made contact with something in his once empty pocket. Reaching inside, he flinched when he pulled out two golden cuffs. They were slightly cracked, but he could still feel the negative energy flowing through them. He was about to turn and throw them off the edge of the temple, but stopped himself. Someone could still easily find them.

"Kevin," he said, speaking quietly while everyone else was talking to Sheena. When the blond man looked at him, Ash held the cuffs out to him. "Damos made this. They're... horrible. They block a person's Aura, but they were still his. I think you should keep them here. Hide them." Ash shook his head. "Damos didn't deserve what happened to him."

Kevin took the cuffs, staring at them before closing his hand around them and nodding his head. "We'll keep them safe. If you don't mind me asking, what did happen to Damos. Your friend said he wasn't what we thought."

Ash looked off at where Arceus had vanished, "He died trying to save him."

"Hmm. Well, at least we know he was a hero, and that everything is right again."

"Yeah." Ash's eyes turned to the ground. "It is."

...

Dawn pushed the meat that was in her hearty helping of stew around, scooping up a bit of it half-heartedly. Her eyes flickered up from the bowl, looking at Brock, to Gary, then Misty, and finally Ash. Everyone was acting in similar ways, staring at their food or eating it slowly. The pokémon had all gone with Nurse Joy, needing a lot of rest and recuperation.

It didn't feel like they had just saved the world.

She dropped her spoon with a loud clatter, drawing everyone's attention towards her. The young girl shook her head and looked towards them. "I can't eat. I just keep thinking about it. What Marcus did to Arcus, and those poor pokémon."

"Pokemon?" Ash repeated, staring at her blankly. He hadn't touched his food at all.

"The Silver Water, remember? It was a mix of normal metals including mercury, but he..." Gary shook his head. "He used steel-type pokémon too. Brock and I saw it." The brunet suddenly growled and slammed his fist into the table, shaking all of their bowls. "I'm glad he's dead. He deserved it and more."

Ash flinched and stared down at his stew again. In everything that had happened, he completely forgot about his brief discovery of what the Silver Water was made of.

"We met someone like that before, someone here," Misty spoke up, her voice uncommonly quiet. "The G-Men arrested him."

"That's it?" Gary growled angrily.

Dawn nodded her head in firm agreement, and was about to vocalize it as well.

"No." The sharp word from Ash drew everyone's attention. He was staring down at his bowl, not bothering to even look up at them. "No one deserves to die."

"So what, they're supposed to sit behind bars for a few years then get out on good behaviour?" The other boy from Pallet scowled at him.

"I never said that. They should be punished, but don't say anyone deserves to die."

"Really? What then? What do you suggest is a good enough punishment for murdering dozens of —?"

"I don't know!" Ash burst out, standing up and spilling his stew in the process. He glared at Gary fiercely. "I don't know what the right thing is! I just know that no one should die!" He turned around and stormed away, up the stairs towards their rooms.

"Oh Mew," Gary ran a hand through his hair, shoulders slumping. "I just hit a sore spot, didn't I?"

"Looks like it," Brock said with a nod of his head, frowning.

"Should we go apologize?" Dawn suggested guilty.

"I'll go," Misty stood up, carefully pushing in her chair. She was quick to follow the same route Ash had taken earlier.

Dawn was about to get up, but Brock gently grabbed her arm and shook his head. "Leave them be. Whatever happened, he's much more likely to tell her alone."

She sat down, but the blue-haired girl didn't like it at all. Looking back down at her stew, she grimaced at the chunks and then pushed the bowl away from her.

...

"Ash?" Misty peaked inside the room he shared with Brock. It was dark, and it took a moment for her eyes to adjust, but she finally spotted him laying on his bed, facing the wall. Closing the door behind her, she walked slowly with a hand out in front of her, stopping when she came into contact with a physical barrier.

She sighed and sat down, her back pressed against the shield. "You don't have to hide. You can talk about whatever you want. I'll listen. You don't have to be alone." For a moment, everything was quiet, and then she heard the squeak of the bed as Ash moved. She stumbled back a bit as the barrier vanished, but caught herself, looking up as Ash sat on the side of the bed. The first thing that caught her attention was the fact that his eyes were red and watery, but she chose not to comment on it. Instead, she got up, sitting beside him so that their arms were pressed against each other and waited.

"I killed them," Ash finally said. "Marcus and Damos. Both of them."

"What?" Whatever she had been expecting, it wasn't that.

"I tried to keep the metal off of Arceus and I tried to keep where they were fighting in one piece but I couldn't and..." He choked on his words. "I couldn't... I wasn't strong enough. I chose Arceus. The ledge broke and..."

"Oh Ash," she reached out, wrapping her arms around him and tugging him close, letting him rest his head on her shoulder. "It wasn't your fault. Arceus... saving him was the right thing."

"If it was Brock or Dawn or Gary or Pikachu or Ria, I don't... I don't know what I would have done." He suddenly inhaled sharply and looked up at her. "I couldn't if it was you. I couldn't pick him, even if it was the right thing. I don't... I don't know what type of person that makes me."

Misty breathed in and out, retaining that information with a bit of shock. She hugged him tightly, resting her cheek on the top of his head as he wrapped his arms around her waist, his shoulders shaking. "You won't have to. I promise." She could have went on about how he was a good person, because she knew Ash Ketchum and while he might have been a little jerk at times, he was nearly as good as a person could get. Instead of talking, them just sat in their silent embrace.

Some wounds couldn't be healed with band-aids, but sometimes the best way to start was just by being there.

...

Brock peered inside of his room, a small smile spreading across his face when he saw Ash and

Misty sleeping haphazardly side by side. They were both peaceful though, and that was what mattered. Looking back, he glanced from one side of him to the next, he watched Gary and Dawn both staring at him curiously, leaning against their own doors.

"They're okay for now. Asleep."

Dawn nodded her head and shifted a bit uncomfortably. "I... is it selfish that I kind of want to wake her up?"

It took Brock a moment to realize just why Dawn would want to do that. He pressed his lips together, brow furrowing slightly before he looked at Gary. "Do you have two beds in your room?"

"Yeah, why?"

"Because no one should be alone after this. Dawn can stay in here." It wasn't just for Dawn though. He would have just went into the room that the girls shared the night before, but a part of him didn't want to be alone either. It made him feel slightly pathetic in a way.

Gary looked a bit surprised by the request before a very small smile appeared on his face and he nodded. "Yeah. You can stay in the spare bed. Like you said, no one should be alone." Though the teenager didn't admit anything, it was enough for Brock to know that he felt the same way. They were all disturbed about what happened, all a bit frightened.

As Dawn went into her room to get her things, Brock walked into his to grab his bag. He stared at his two friends, frowning a bit when he realized that they had both been crying at some point of time. Passing Dawn on the way out, he put a hand on her shoulder and said, "If you wake up and don't want to bother them, you can always come and wake me up, alright?"

"Thanks," she smiled at him gratefully before dropping her bag onto the floor and climbing into the bed. Brock just smiled and closed the door behind him, walking to the other room.

Gary was busy writing something down in a book while Brock got himself situated in the other bed. The teenage frowned and hummed slightly before looking at him. "How do you do it?"

"Do what?"

"Live through all of this? I know it's not the first time." His viridian eyes were almost pleading for an answer that the young man honestly wasn't sure of.

Shrugging a bit, Brock pulled the blankets up over him and said, "You can't on your own. That's why we push on together."

...

A single day of recuperation really wasn't enough, considering all of them slept through half of it. Yet, here they were, backpacks ready and standing in front of a transit that would go to the next city, the opposite direction of where most of them were heading.

Gary had decided the day before that he would stick with Ash, Brock and Dawn until they reached the next town, since it was close to where he was meeting up with Professor Rowan again. For now though, he just stood awkwardly, not really sure what to do with himself.

"Call us as soon as you get home," Dawn demanded, hugging Misty tightly and looking close to tears.

Misty laughed and returned the embrace. "You'll be in the middle of the woods. Lost, if you give Ash the map." The boy in question rolled his eyes at her.

"Right, right," the blue-haired girl jumped a bit on the spot. "We'll call you when we get to the next Pokemon Center. Promise!"

"Yeah, you take care of yourself," Brock added, clasping a hand on the redhead's shoulder. "And I guess we'll see you at the Sinnoh League Conference. It'll come faster than you think."

"Especially with how busy the gym is going to be," Misty groaned and nodded her head. She suddenly looked towards Gary, and said, "I'm going to visit Delia after I check up on the gym. I'll tell your grandfather that you say hi, and that you're playing nice with others."

Gary snorted with amusement and shook his head. "I'm not sure he'd believe you, but I'll hold you to that." He then watched as Misty turned to Ash, a bit curious when she poked his chest roughly.

"You. You stop jumping off of cliffs and onto the backs of legendary pokemon and getting into fights with pokemon poachers and using yourself as a target for training! There's more I could add to that, but I'm not missing this bus again."

"I promise nothing," Ash replied. Still, he grinned a bit, reaching out and tugging the girl towards him in a tight hug that she returned, despite the fact that she was grumbling under her breath. The brown-eyed boy muttered something quietly, and Misty laughed. She backed up a bit, grinned at Pikachu, who jumped from Ash's shoulder to her own and nuzzled her cheek. Ria, who had been standing silently beside her trainer, jumped up into her arms.

"You take care of this idiot," she said playfully to the two pokemon, giving them one last pat and hug before setting them down. They stood side by side, and at the same time, gave the same mocking salute.

"Traitors," Ash mumbled, but he still held onto the girl's hand under she had to let go to climb onto the bus.

They all watched as Misty moved to the back of the bus and stared waving to them. Dawn threw her hand into the air enthusiastically, and soon all of them, including Gary, followed suit as the vehicle pulled away from the curb.

Gary moved up beside Ash, who was the last to stop waving as the transit drove out of sight. When the other boy finally dropped his hand, the brunet asked, "So, what now?" Dawn and Brock both looked over at them curiously.

Ash's brow furrowed slightly before he looked at Pikachu as the pokemon climbed up onto his shoulder, smiling brightly. Ria jumped up onto the other one and pumped her fist excitedly. The boy looked towards the ground and a small smile appeared on his face. Looking up, Ash looked at him and said, "Guess that's what we gotta figure out, right? After all," he looked up towards the sky, that small smile still on his face, "we control our own destinies."

Gary stared at him for a moment and then nodded his head. Dawn looked up towards Brock with a smile on her face, and the young man chuckled a bit. Ash scratched Pikachu behind the ear and grinned at Ria, before he started walking ahead, everyone else following him, on towards the next adventure.

-The End-



Chapter End Notes

Written by: Skylight Sparkle

Edited by: CLAVUS

End Notes

Did you guys really think I was going to just leave the Sinnoh movies without doing this one? I hope not!

Firstly, I really want to thank my beta, CLAVUS! She's awesome enough to take the time to go back over EVERYTHING I've done (it's in the works). She's also been giving me really good tips on how to improve more.

Secondly, I've been a bit busy lately so I can't PROMISE that I'll stick to my schedule of updating once a week, but I'll try my hardest! I know it's Wednesday (where I am) but I'll probably end up sticking to Sunday/Monday as my post dates if I do manage to get them once a week. If not, I'll update as soon as possible!

Reason for the change of scenery: seasons actually change in this universe, not just depending on the location. It's winter now, so it's winter here, for the most part.

Outside of that, I'm not going to give you any warning ahead of time for anything. I've done that in the past where I've hinted something was going to happen, but all bets are off this time around. Why? You'll see!

Though you're definitely going to notice something odd about how I'm writing this story. You might have noticed it in this prologue-type chapter. We'll see.

Hope you guys like this one as much as you liked Distortion! Seriously, thank you to

everyone who reviewed that! You're all awesome!

Written by: Skylight Sparkle

Edited by: CLAVUS

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!